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Edited by Sir John Hammerton

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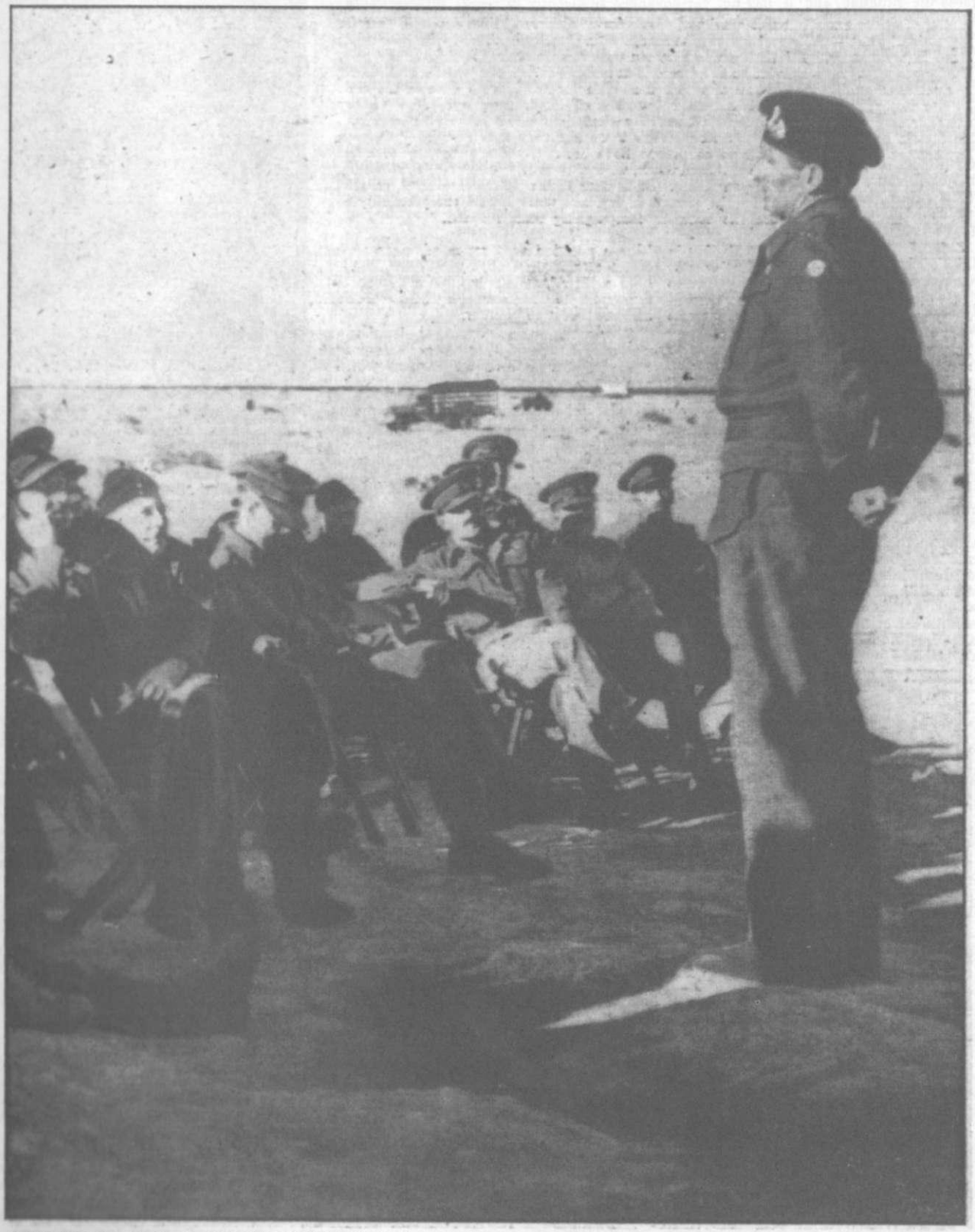


'THE EIGHTH ARMY IS ON THE MOVE.' This significant announcement came at the end of Mr. Churchill's broadcast on March 21, 1943. The next day the world learned that Gen. Montgomery's forces had already begun their powerful assault on the Mareth positions; in little more than a week the whole Line was overrun. This photo shows the 8th Army's indomitable commander in a forward area in Tunisia, detailing his plans to members of his staff.

*Photo, British Official: Crown Copyright*

NO. 153 WILL BE PUBLISHED FRIDAY, APRIL 30

# THE BATTLE FRONTS

*by* Maj.-Gen. Sir Charles Gwynn, K.C.B., D.S.O.

SINCE I last wrote in the middle of March 1943 the battle of Tunisia has begun. At the end of the month it is still in its early stages, and it will probably pass through many more. The need for secrecy prevents the release of definite information as regards the situation, and it has not yet advanced sufficiently to reveal with certainty the courses either side will pursue. The general strategic lay-out of the theatre of operations is clear enough, but it admits of development on several lines depending on the commanders' plans—and even they may be modified or drastically changed by the results of tactical encounters. All that can be foreseen with some certainty is a fierce struggle, probably prolonged over a period to be measured in months rather than weeks, and falling into a series of well-defined phases of which the battle for the Mareth Line is the first. Ultimate victory for the Allies is assured; but it is of importance to achieve victory in the shortest possible time—for time is essentially what the enemy is attempting to gain.

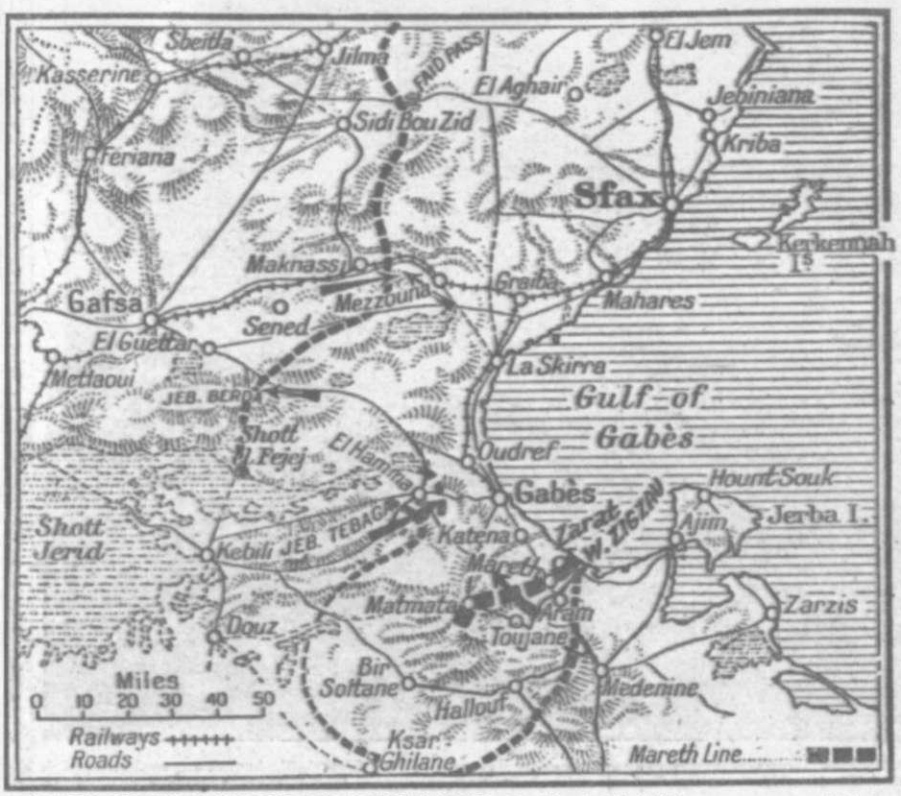
In Russia during the fortnight under review there has been much hard fighting on many sectors of the front, but thaw conditions have brought about something of a lull in major operations. Progress has slowed down, with attacks and counter-attacks aiming at local rather than at sweeping successes. It is clear that neither side is yet content to stabilize the front and wait for the ground to dry, and there is still the possibility of important developments before the summer campaigning season opens.

**NORTH AFRICA** With the battle of Tunisia still in its initial stages, too much importance should not be attached to the first tactical encounters. It must be realized that the fight for the Mareth Line is only an opening episode, which may or may not prove to have a decisive bearing on final results, depending on whether Rommel is determined to attempt to hold his positions at all costs or whether he will, while his line of retreat is still open, join forces with Von Arnim in the north.

The general strategic position is clear. The Axis main object must be to retain their hold on Tunis and Bizerta. Von Arnim has the task of meeting any attack made by the 1st Army in the north; and that definitely prevents him from cooperating with Rommel in the south. Rommel has much the more difficult task. He has to hold off the attack of the 8th Army, and at the same time to meet the threat of the French and American forces to his line of communications and retreat. He has had, it is true, in the Mareth Line a position very much stronger against direct attack than that which he failed to hold at El Alamein; but he lacks adequate numerical strength to meet both a direct attack and the threat to his rear.

Rommel's main advantage is that he possesses a powerful and mobile armoured reserve and a good road system by which it can be concentrated for counter-attack at the most threatened point, or against any one of the Allied columns which may give him an opportunity. His main object must be, by taking full advantage of interior lines, to prevent the Allied 1st and 8th Armies joining hands in a concentric close attack on the vital ports in the north.

General Alexander's problems are those of a numerically superior force acting on exterior lines. By maintaining unrelenting pressure at all points his opponent is prevented from concentrating reserves for counter-strokes to an extent that cannot be met by elastic defence at the point where counter-attacks are delivered. It may be necessary to give ground at such points




**EIGHTH ARMY'S ADVANCE ON MARETH LINE.** On March 29, 1943 it was announced that Matmata, Mareth and Toujane had fallen to Gen. Montgomery's troops, and that Rommel was falling back towards Gabès. This map shows (dotted) the Allied line at March 27. The solid black arrows indicate the American attack from Maknassi; Gen. Freyberg's left flanking movement ϕ Ϟ El Hamma; and the frontal assault on the Mareth Line. *By courtesy of The Times*

**FIELD AMBULANCE** of the Indian Medical Service rescues a member of a Gurkha battalion in Tunisia. This man was wounded when taking part in an attack on enemy positions in the Matmata hills. *Photo, British Official*

while increasing pressure at others. Already we have seen this process in operation. Rommel has carried out counter-attacks at the most threatened points, but he has been forced to split up his reserves, with the consequence that counter-attacks have failed to achieve any considerable success and they are a wasting asset owing to losses.

Alexander's chief disadvantages are the long and difficult lines of communication, which probably limit the size and affect the composition of each of his attacking columns. This imposes a degree of caution. The main pressure on Rommel will probably have to be applied by the 8th Army, not only in its frontal attack but by the outflanking column which is threatening the Gabès gap at El Hamma. If the latter can maintain its position on the Jebel Tebaga ridge and can be reinforced—not an easy matter with such a long and difficult line of communications—it is very hard not to believe that Rommel will be compelled to withdraw to the Gabès position. An even more complete retreat would be unavoidable if the American thrust through Maknassi gains weight.

ROMMEL being attacked on such a wide front and from so many different directions must rely mainly on the mobility of his reserve fist. That reserve has already had heavy losses in its counter-attacks and is constantly harried from the air; it is therefore, as I have said, a wasting asset. The doubtful reliability in an emergency of some of his Italian troops must also be a source of anxiety to him. In the circumstances, the time must be drawing near for him to decide on retreat, or, deliberately, to face annihilation in order to gain time. A rapid, well-organized retreat might be combined with a heavy counter-attack possibly against the American Maknassi column.

I cannot believe that Rommel, who has so often saved himself from disaster by retreat, would deliberately allow himself to be enclosed in a trap He probably realizes that he delayed retreat too long and expended his reserves too lavishly at El Alamein; and he must know that the loss of his army would leave Von Arnim in a desperate situation. His decision one way or the other cannot be long delayed; and I expect his retreat, probably covered by strong

counter-attacks, will have started before this article is published.

★Twenty-four hours after I had written as above came the news that the Mareth Line was in our hands. Once again Rommel had been out-manoeuvred and out-fought by the 8th Army. It may seem that Montgomery's outflanking attack on El Hamma which compelled Rommel to retreat was an obvious manoeuvre, and that his costly frontal attack was unnecessary. It should be realized, however, how audacious was the manoeuvre, for it involved dividing the 8th Army into two widely separated parts, and the attack, at the end of a long and difficult route, on an enemy strongly posted and possessing excellent and short lines of communication by which he could bring up his powerful reserves to counter-attack.

In view of the danger of defeat in detail the encircling attack was, in fact, only

**JAP SUPPLIES moving up Burmese rivers have been heavily strafed by the R.A.F. Here is a typical target. The enemy vessel in the foreground has heeled over as a result of blast.**
*Photo, British Official: Crown Copyright*

justifiable if the frontal attack was delivered with sufficient energy to engage a large part of the enemy's reserves, and if the communications of the force which delivered the flanking attack were secure from interruption. The first condition was fulfilled by the original frontal attack, and I suggest that the latter depended on the impassable nature of the Matmata hills on which Rommel had relied for the protection of his right flank, but which in practice protected the communications of the outflanking column. To Montgomery's promptitude in grasping the possibilities of the situation as it developed, and in modifying his original plans accordingly, his victory must presumably be attributed; but it needed a magnificent response by his troops and the R.A.F. to the calls made on them to bring it to fruition.

**RUSSIA** After the recapture of Kharkov —admitted by the Russians on March 14—the Germans drove eastwards towards Chuguyev, which stands at the elbow formed by the upper and middle reaches of the Donetz. At the same time they redoubled their attacks northwards in attempts to force a passage of the middle reaches of the river while it was still frozen.

**RUSSIAN CENTRAL FRONT. On March 26, 1943 it was stated that the Red Army was only 25 miles from Smolensk. Arrows show direction of main Soviet thrusts.**
*By courtesy of The Times*

If this pincer attack had succeeded it would almost certainly have entailed the loss of Kupiansk and of immensely valuable railway communications which the Russians had recovered. There was desperate fighting, with heavy losses on both sides; but the Russian defence stood firm against repeated attacks, in which the Germans made prodigal use of reserve divisions, armoured and infantry, supported by great concentrations of aircraft. Not only did the Russians prevent the enemy getting a permanent footing on the left bank of the river, but they themselves retained a certain number of bridgeheads on the right bank.

Towards the end of the period under review, the ice on the river appears to have become too weak to take heavy weights, while it still prevented bridging operations. As a result, the scale of attacks diminished, though local attacks against the Russian bridgeheads across the river continue.

As their attempts against the Middle Donetz weakened, the Germans appear to have added to the weight of their drive north of Kharkov towards the Upper Donetz. Their capture of Byelgorod, on the right bank of the river, was a serious loss to the Russians, for it interrupted the railway from Kursk to Kupiansk and also implied a threat to the southern flank of the Russian offensive west of Kursk, which was also encountering increasing opposition on its front. The Germans have without success made many attempts to cross the Upper Donetz in the Byelgorod neighbourhood, but both here and in the Orel region the situation is obscure and it seems probable that mud is hampering the operations of both sides.

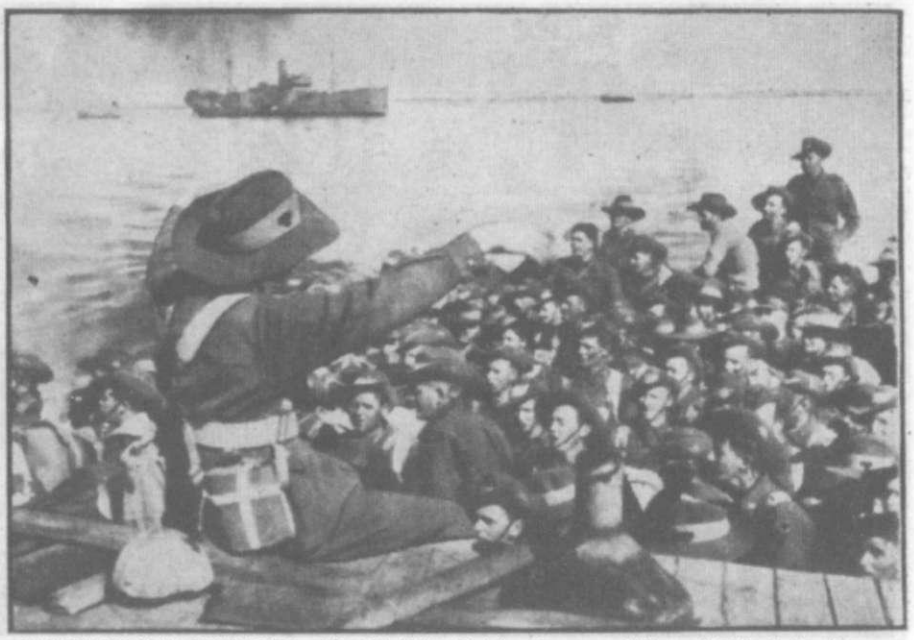
Meanwhile, on the central front the Russians have retained the initiative and have made steady if slow progress westwards from Vyasma and southwards from the line of the Rzhev-Veliki-Luki railway, forcing and turning the line of the Upper Dnieper. The Germans have retreated fighting hard, and their resistance is stiffening; but it seems improbable that they will stand to fight at all costs till the outer strong points of the Smolensk defences are reached. The Russians are getting very close to them now, and it seems probable that when they make contact with them they will not, at this time, attempt a further direct drive towards Smolensk itself. So far as ground conditions allow they may, however, continue their attacks in the more lightly defended fronts north and south of the Smolensk bastion.

The German counter-attacks about Zhizdra, north of Briansk, which were on the scale of a minor offensive of a forestalling or diversionary character, seem to indicate an attempt to frustrate some such plan. It may be noted, too, that the attacks met strong Russian forces and failed to make progress.

The early phases of the spring thaw are, however, already hampering Russian operations. Frost enables ski-troops to operate at night and in the morning, but by midday slush makes movement desperately difficult.

FARTHER north in the Ilmen and Leningrad regions the situation remains obscure; but the Germans evidently expect the Russians to undertake further operations on a considerable scale before the winter is over.

In these recent operations along the whole front the Germans have made lavish use of reserves. This would seem to indicate that they have no intention of attempting any decisive offensive operations, in the early part of the summer at any rate, and that their main immediate object is to secure a favourably situated, stabilized front as a springboard for an offensive at a later stage, or from which a withdrawal, if events rendered that necessary, could be carried out without much difficulty when the state of the ground facilitates movement. But the winter war is not yet over, and much may happen before it closes.



**HOME FROM MIDDLE EAST. The 9th A.I.F. Division, known as "Rats of Tobruk" owing to their long occupation of that fortress, recently arrived back in Australia. On March 23, 1943 Mr. Curtin announced that Mr. Churchill had sent a congratulatory message to Lt.-Gen. Sir L. Morshead, commanding the division. Here is a group of men singing as they are ferried to the homeward-bound ships.** *Photo, British Official*

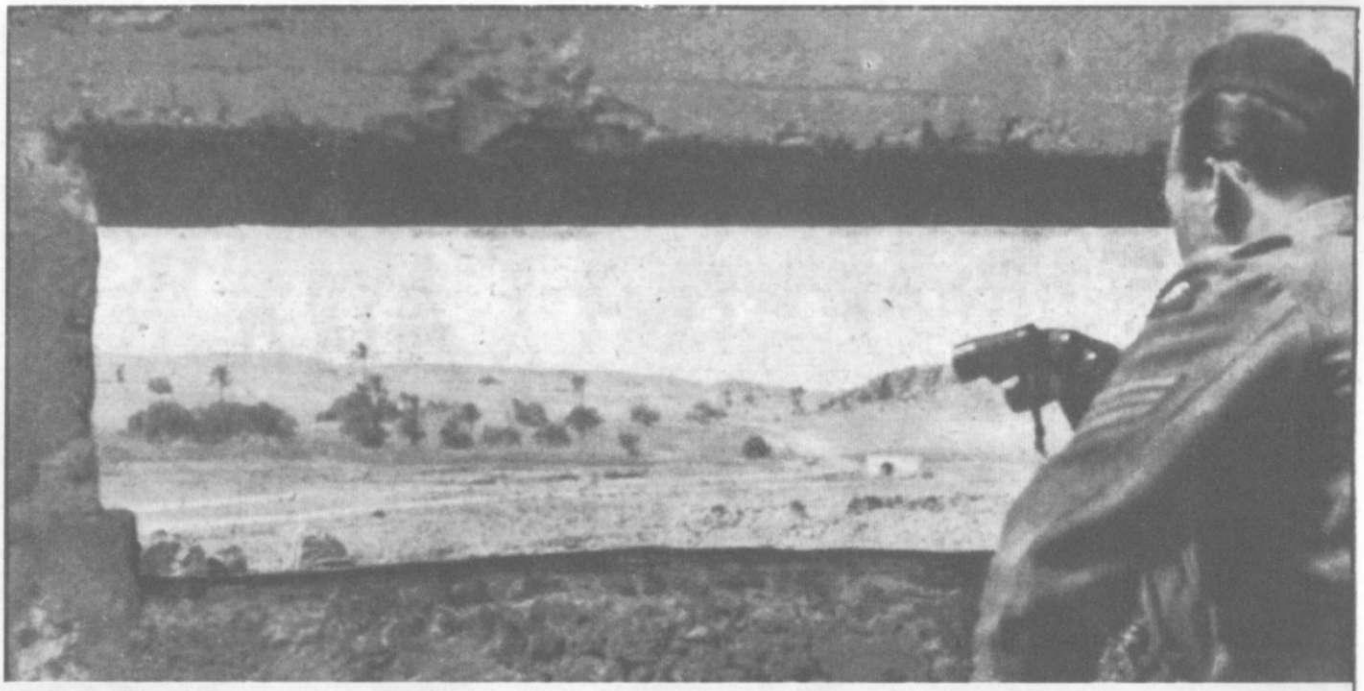
# Our Guns Stopped Them Dead in Their Tracks

**ROMMEL'S TANKS IN S. TUNISIA** made a violent assault on 8th Army positions on March 5, 1943. The attack failed, and the enemy was forced to withdraw to the hills N.W. of Medenine. Altogether 52 German tanks were knocked out, estimated at about half the total Axis force engaged, including eight of the new type Mark III's. Top, a six-pounder battery of an anti-tank regiment, which destroyed five Mark III's, shown in action. Below, three of the enemy tanks burning.



*Photos, British Official, Crown Copyright*

# Opening Shots in the Great Battle for Mareth



**EIGHTH ARMY'S FRONTAL ATTACK** on the Mareth Line, concentrated on a 6-mile front between the sea and the Medenine-Gabès road, scored the opening round of the great battle which began on March 19, 1943. Furious fighting developed as the result of Rommel's counter-attack launched to restore the German main defence-line. Top, view from an observation-post outside Foum Tatahouine, southern bastion of the Mareth Line, which Gen. Montgomery's forces captured on Feb. 18. Below, a 4·5-in. medium gun contributes its quota to the great night barrage that heralded the 8th Army's assault.



*Photos, British Official: Crown Copyright*

# Before the Big Push in Anderson's Sector

**BATTLE OF TUNISIA.** 1, Axis prisoners, captured by U.S. troops, shown en route to a prison camp. 2, Formidable 25-pounder gun mounted on a Valentine tank chassis. 3, Gen. Alexander, deputy C.-in-C., Allied forces in N. Africa, at the wheel of a "jeep" during a visit to an advanced Brigade H.Q. 4, Carriers wait to advance as a Bren gunner keeps watch (left). They are manned by men from a Home Counties regiment, supported by units of a Scottish regiment.



*Photos, British Official; British Newsreels, Sport & General*

# Joyous Homecoming of Men Wounded in the War

FROM THE MIDDLE EAST these British soldiers, many of whom were wounded in the battles of Egypt, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, crowd the rails of the white-painted hospital ship Atlantis as she arrives at a home port. The majority of the casualties had treatment in South Africa before embarkation. Nearly 1,000 sick and wounded men of the 8th Army—some of whom had been abroad for two years—recently returned to this country for rest and recuperation. *Photo, G.P.U.*

# THE WAR AT SEA

by Francis E. McMurtrie

In March 1943 the Admiralty announced a change in the command of one of our three principal fleets. Vice-Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, aged 55, hitherto Second-in-Command, then relieved Admiral Sir John Tovey (aged 57) as Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet. The latter, it is understood, relinquished this command by his own desire in order to facilitate the advancement of younger officers. He now becomes Commander-in-Chief at the Nore in succession to Admiral Sir George Lyon.

On the eve of Sir John Tovey's departure the King made a point of visiting the Home Fleet and paying a personal farewell to its Chief. Under Sir John Tovey its efficiency has reached a very high level, as demonstrated when the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen broke out into the Atlantic in May 1941. The former was hunted down and sunk within the space of six days, while the latter was driven into Brest, where she remained blockaded for nearly nine months.

Other changes in high naval appointments coincided with the alteration in command of the Home Fleet. Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Moore, Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, took the place of Admiral Fraser as Second-in-Command, and was himself relieved by Vice-Admiral Sir Neville Syfret, previously in command of "Force H," based on Gibraltar. The latter force was taken over by Vice-Admiral A. U. Willis.

Such changes in wartime are an excellent thing, as they ensure that officers at the Admiralty and at sea have had recent experience of each other's problems, enabling them to work together with greater efficiency.

Mr. Churchill made the definite statement on March 25 that the United Nations have afloat a substantially larger fleet than they had at the worst moment of the U-boat warfare, and that this improvement is continuing. This assurance may be taken to imply that, though the present intensified attack by enemy submarines on our convoys is causing serious losses, these are not up to German expectations. It has been reported from a neutral source that improved defence tactics have caused heavy U-boat losses, the best answer that could be made to the attack. Not until enemy submarines are being destroyed faster than they can be built will it be possible to say that the menace has been mastered.

In the meantime Dr. Goebbels continues to make extravagant claims concerning Allied shipping losses. Invariably these are much exaggerated, but obviously he cannot afford to be moderate in his claims. The official view in this country, despite severe criticism, is that it would not pay us at this stage to disclose actual figures of mercantile tonnage sunk by the enemy, who would thus receive a useful guide to the progress of the U-boat campaign. For a similar reason no reports are made, save in exceptional cases, of the numerous enemy submarines destroyed; though it has been stated officially that of late the rate of destruction has shown a gratifying improvement.

## Merchant Navy Personnel Rescued from the Sea

Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport, revealed recently that on the average 87 per cent are saved of ships' companies of cargo vessels sunk by enemy action. This is a high tribute not only to the life-saving appliances now in general use, but also to the diligence with which escort vessels and other merchantmen seek for survivors. It is, of course, obvious that in the Battle of the Atlantic the maintenance in adequate numbers of an experienced Merchant Navy personnel is even more important than the replacement of ships.

A good example of the type of attack with which our convoys have to contend was contained in the official account of an action in the Atlantic in February. In this series of attacks, which continued for three and a half days, at least two U-boats were accounted for, one by the surface escort and one by Coastal Command aircraft which arrived on the second day.

The former enemy submarine was sighted on the surface seven miles away by H.M.S. Beverley, an ex-American destroyer commanded by Lt.-Com. R. A. Price, R.N. When the Beverley had approached to within two-and-a-half miles the U-boat dived, but the Beverley succeeded in keeping her under observation, while a second destroyer, H.M.S. Vimy (Lt.-Com. R. B. Stannard, V.C., R.N.R.), dropped a series of depth charges. After the third batch the U-boat appeared on the surface again, and was instantly fired on by both destroyers. Her crew emerged and jumped into the sea just before the submarine started to sink by the stern. She went down vertically, her bow being the last part visible. Altogether 49 prisoners were recovered, four of whom died and were buried at sea.

**Vice-Adm. SIR B. FRASER, whose appointment as C.-in-C. Home Fleet (with acting rank of Admiral), in succession to Adm. Sir J. Tovey, was announced on March 23, 1943. He is 55.** *Photo, Vandyk*

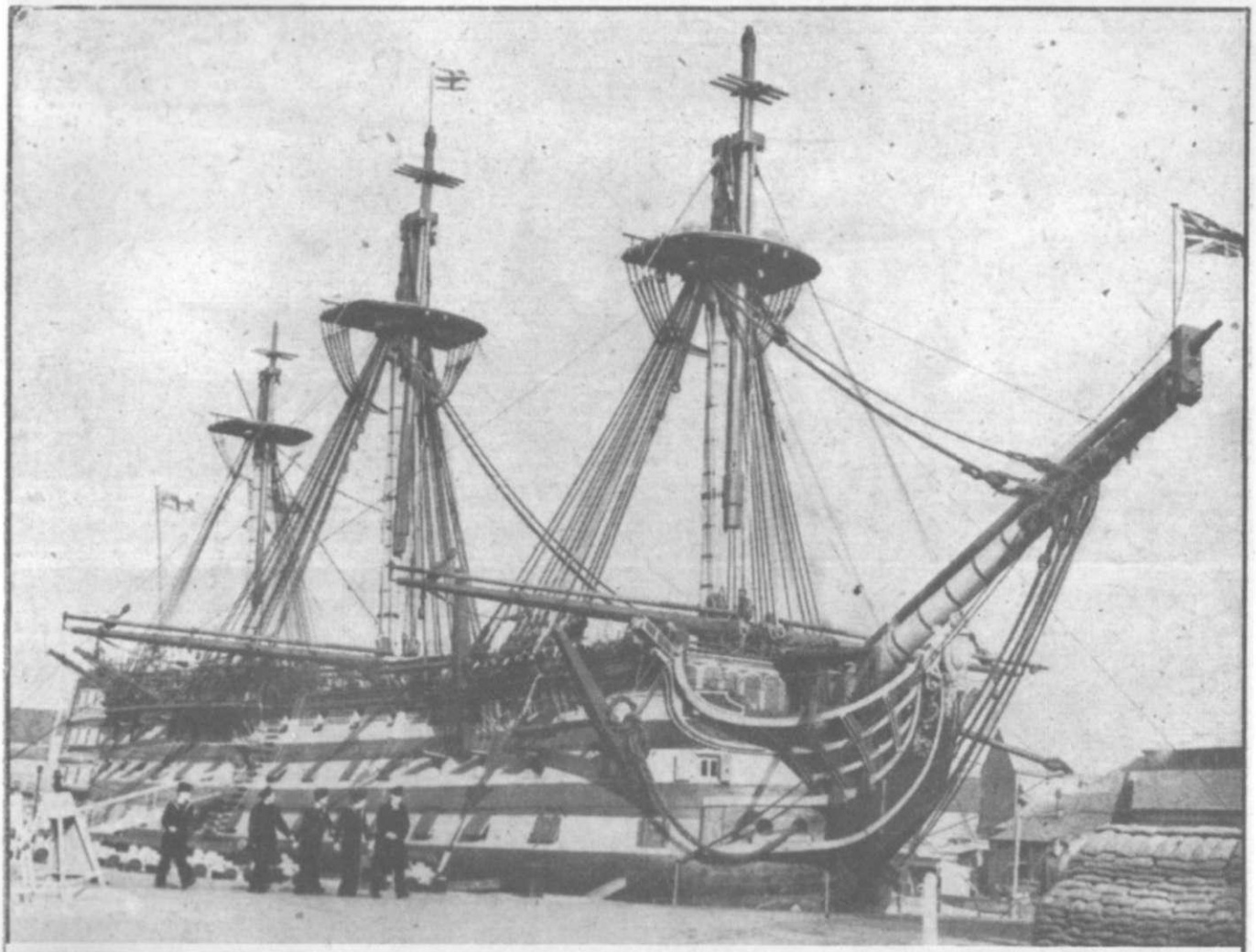
Another U-boat was seen at this time, and during the night the attack was pursued by no less than five. Other vessels of the escort took active measures against the enemy, including H.M. corvettes Abelia, Mignonette, and Campanula, the U.S. destroyer Babbitt, and the Fighting French corvette Lobelia. To the last-named credit must be given for a second U-boat very seriously damaged, and probably destroyed. The Beverley also attacked several of the enemy submarines, damaging and possibly destroying at least two. Aircraft of the Sunderland and Liberator types finished off one U-boat and damaged four others.

Though the escort of three destroyers and four corvettes may seem fairly strong, it is evident that double this number of warships could have accomplished more against the convoy's assailants. Before the U-boat menace can be really scotched it will be necessary to have escort vessels available in much larger numbers than hitherto, as well as to devise some method by which aircraft cooperation can be afforded all the way across the Atlantic. Though the range of shore-based aircraft has been largely extended, there is still a considerable gap in mid-ocean which there seems no possibility of bridging at present. The provision of more aircraft-carriers for convoy work is an evident essential.

Colonel Knox, the United States Secretary of the Navy, doubtless had this in mind when he announced that dozens of American escort aircraft-carriers are now in service, with scores more under construction. So far the names of 13 of these vessels have been published, the U.S.S. Altamaha, Barnes, Block Island, Bogue, Card, Charger, Copahee, Core, Croatan, Glacier, Hamlin, Long Island, and Nassau. It is understood that all are ex-mercantile hulls of over 17,000 tons displacement, adapted for carrying up to 30 fighters or a smaller number of other types of aircraft. They are propelled by Diesel engines of the Busch-Sulzer type at a maximum speed of 16·5 knots and are armed with light anti-aircraft weapons and machine-guns. Though their low speed renders them unsuitable for work with a fleet, for escort purposes their value cannot be questioned.

**H.M.S. VIMY, commanded by Lt.-Cdr. R. B. Stannard, V.C. (see Vol. 3, p. 222), was escorting her first N. Atlantic convoy when a U-boat pack attacked. The ensuing battle lasted for 3 days and nights, 2 U-boats being sunk and many others damaged. The destroyer Vimy sank one of the enemy submarines, the members of whose crew are shown coming ashore under escort at a Northern port.** *Photo, British Official: Crown Copyright*

# After 165 Years H.M.S. Victory Still Serves

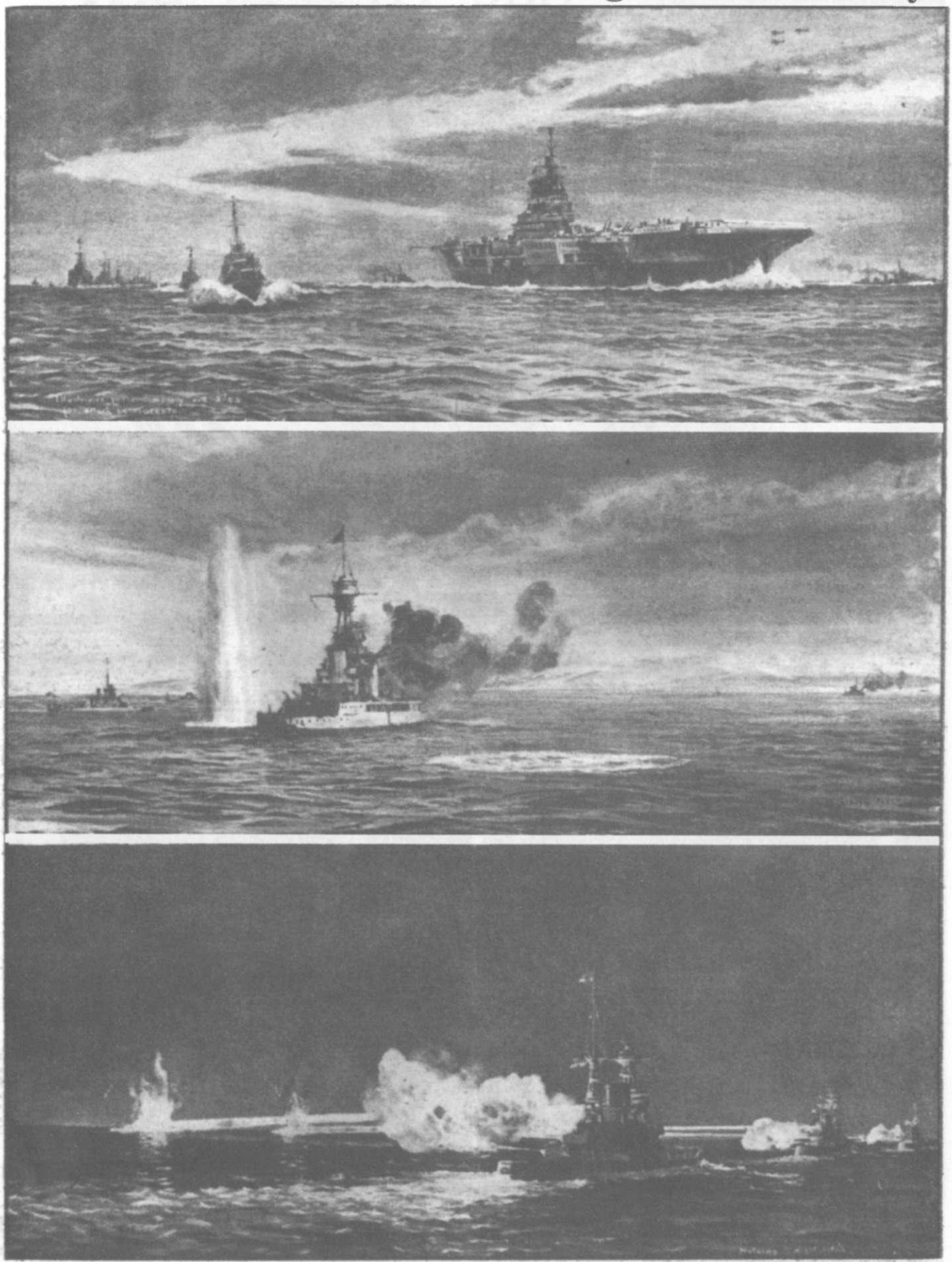


**H.M.S. VICTORY as she appears today in her dry-dock at Portsmouth: topgallant masts struck, topmasts and jib-boom housed, and yards lowered on deck. Below, left, commissioned and warrant officer candidates engaged in a discussion round one of the old-time guns; right, tea in one of the broad-side messes. The deal table is slung from a beam. Capt. A Grant, C.B.E., D.S.O., is in command of the Victory.** *Photos, British Official; Crown Copyright*

NELSON'S FLAGSHIP in his last and greatest battle is now being used as a naval barracks. Fifty prospective Naval officers, studying for commissions and awaiting their Selection Board (they will become temporary sub-lieutenants, R.N.V.R., in the Special Branch), eat and sleep on the same mess-deck and in the same surroundings as did Nelson's men at Trafalgar in 1805. These ratings live aboard from one to three months, and sleep in hammocks slung from the rails used by the Victory sailors, though they get more than the regulation 17 ins. of slinging width that was all that was allowed when the flagship's complement was 850 men – equal to that of a modern cruiser.

LAUNCHED in 1765 the Victory was not commissioned until 1778. She was paid off from active service in 1812, and since 1825 has flown almost continuously the flag of either the Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard or the C.-in-C. at Portsmouth. Placed in a special dry-dock at Portsmouth in 1922, she was restored to the same condition as at Trafalgar 138 years ago.

# Mediterranean War Seen Through an Artist's Eye

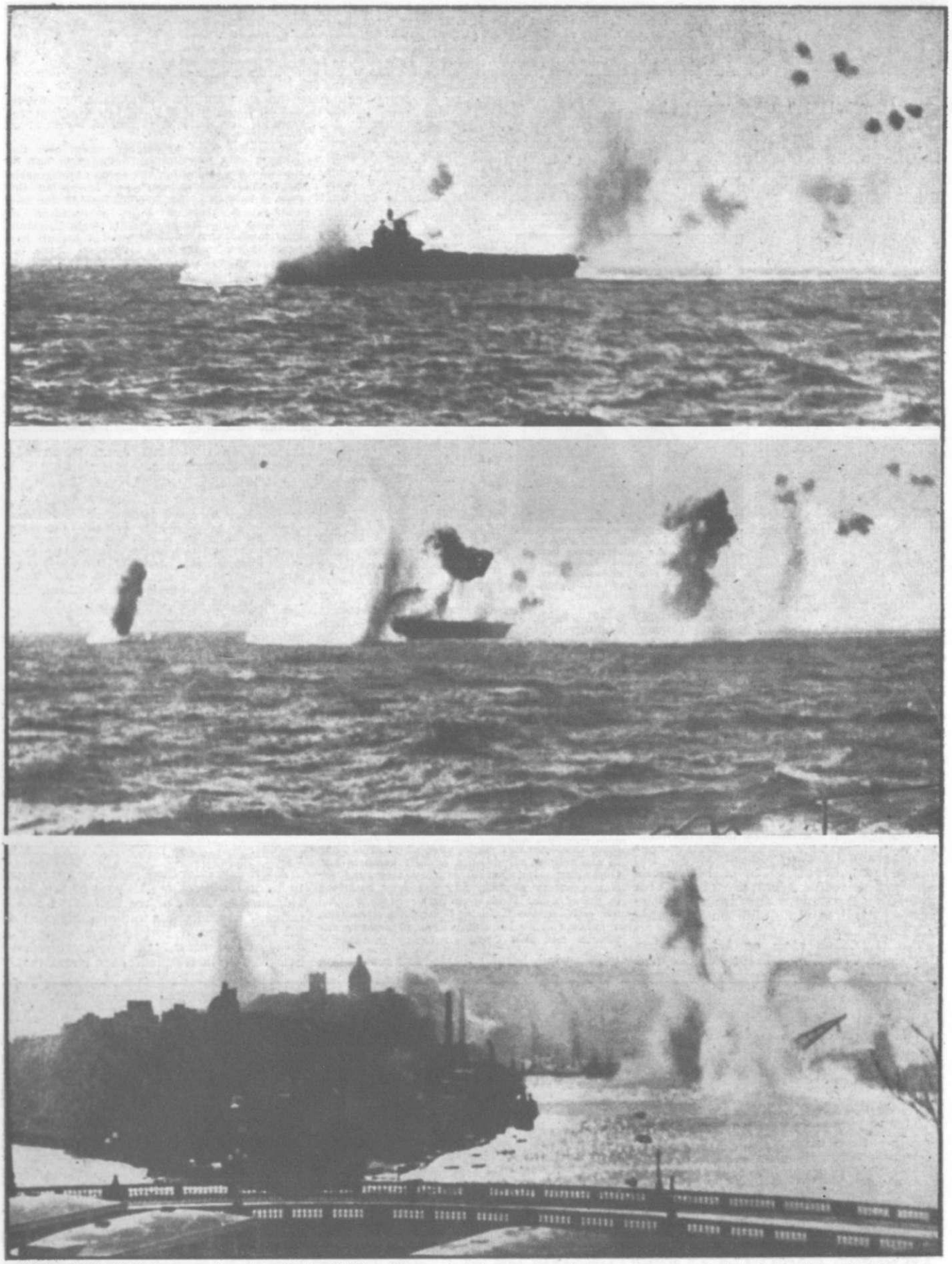


**EAST OF MALTA, WEST OF SUEZ,'** reviewed in page 684, contains several reproductions of naval paintings by Lt.-Cdr. R. Langmaid, R.N., who was attached to Admiral Cunningham's staff as official Admiralty artist. Here are three of the most striking. Top, Taranto, Nov. 11, 1940 : H.M.S. Illustrious (see opposite page) and her destroyer screen part company with the 3rd Cruiser Squadron. Centre, the monitor Terror and gunboats Ladybird and Aphis bombard Italian bases in Libya, Dec. 1940. Below, Matapan, March 27-28, 1941 : left to right, burning Italian cruisers Zara and Fiume, the Barham, Valiant and the flagship Warspite.



*British Official: Crown Copyright reserved*

# On Fire and Crippled, Illustrious Won Through



H.M.S. ILLUSTRIOUS, famous aircraft-carrier (see Vol. 4, p. 108), was singled out as the main target for enemy attacks in January 1941. Top, German dive-bombers begin their assault on Jan. 10. At that time the Illustrious was with the fleet, 100 miles W. of Malta. Centre, she is hit, and set on fire; yet six hours after the attack she reached harbour. Below, while working parties repair her damage, the great ship becomes a target for further dive-bombing attacks as she lies alongside the dockyard at Valetta. On Jan. 23 the Illustrious left the island fortress, and was escorted to Alexandria.

# East of Malta, West of Suez: The Navy on the Job

Describing the work of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean from the outbreak of war in 1939 until the spring of 1941, East of Malta, West of Suez (H.M. Stationery Office, 1s.) is a naval story of the deepest interest and importance. Though no name appears on its title page, it was written by Paymaster-Captain L. A. Ritchie, known to fame as a writer of novels of the sea under the pseudonym of Bartimeus. Below is an appreciation of the book, and a number of illustrations from it are reproduced in pages 682 and 683.

SOME time in 1940 the billposters were busy in Italy pasting up on convenient wall-spaces large copies of a map of Italy, bearing the comforting heading E VULNERABILE L'ITALIA ? NO ! On the map were symbolic representations of Italy's military, naval and air might. The surrounding seas were shown to be securely held by a multitude of warships, and from the toe of Italy past Sicily to Bizerta was a great muster of Mussolini's navy. If the map were to be believed, the Mediterranean life-line of Britain's Empire was snipped through by the Italian scissors. "Is Italy vulnerable ? NO !"

**Cmdr. C. L. KEIGHLEY-PEACH, "lone" fighter-pilot, whose heroic performances against Italian dive-bombers in the Mediterranean in 1940 are described in this page.**
*Photo, Daily Mirror*

But Italy *was* vulnerable; the Italian fleet was very far from being that sure shield that the propagandists portrayed. At first, however, things looked pretty bright from the Italian windows. In June 1940 the French armies were being ground beneath Hitler's tanks. The Mediterranean was closed as a supply route from the United Kingdom, so that British reinforcements for the Near East had to go round the Cape. Malta looked an easy prize. To use a naval colloquialism, it must have appeared to Mussolini like "money for old rope." We may be sure that if it hadn't, he would not have declared war at midnight on June 10.

Even to Admiral Cunningham, Britain's C.-in-C. in the Mediterranean, the outlook may have seemed pretty grim, yet from the very first hour of the new war he secured the initiative, and maintained it. On Mussolini's map-posters the Mediterranean was marked *Mare Nostrum*, but the Italian admirals showed no eagerness to make good the claim. Time after time in those first weeks and in all the months that followed, Cunningham trailed his coat before the Italian bases, hoping to entice Mussolini's ships out to battle; but in spite of his superiority in numbers and armament, the enemy refused to venture all on the throw of a single sea fight.

The first clash came on July 8, when Captain R. C. O'Conor, in the Neptune, had the privilege of signalling "Enemy battle fleet in sight" for the first time in the Mediterranean since the Napoleonic wars. When the enemy battleships were engaged by the Warspite (flying the C.-in-C.'s flag) and the Malaya, they turned away under cover of smoke, closely followed by their attendant cruisers, and disappeared into the mist. The British ships, with the exception of the Gloucester, suffered neither damage nor casualties, but on their way back to Alexandria they were attacked almost continuously by Italian planes, nearly 400 bombs being dropped—without, however, any hit being scored. The action's chief interest lay in this revelation that Italy had decided to put her trust in the air arm as the weapon best calculated to defeat Britain's sea power.

For a nation which had air bases, actual or potential, straddling the central Mediterranean and stretching along the entire Libyan coast, this must have seemed the obvious strategy. By way of answer we had the aircraft-carrier and the Fleet Air Arm.

Until May 1940 the Fleet in the eastern Mediterranean had no carrier; then the twenty-year-old Eagle (Capt. A. R. M. Bridge, R.N.) joined the Fleet from the East Indies. She brought with her two squadrons of Swordfish, and later acquired four Gladiators as the basis of a fighter squadron. To quote a passage from East of Malta, West of Suez:

> There were no fighter pilots on board, but the Commander (Flying) of the Eagle, Commander C. L. Keighley-Peach, was an "old lag" of Fleet Air Arm fighters. ("Old lag" is their phrase—actually he was thirty-eight.) For a while he went up alone to defend the Fleet. Later he trained two of the bomber pilots as fighter pilots; the three of them, until they were reinforced by more machines and pilots, were all the Fleet had in the way of air defence against bombers and shadowers. Between them they accounted for eleven enemy aircraft, and somehow contrived to preserve the Fleet from major casualty. On one occasion the "old lag" went up alone with a bullet still in his thigh from a previous encounter and shot down an enemy machine.

This grimly heroic episode has a companion in the story of the *four* Gladiators which were all that the R.A.F. had in Malta at the outbreak of war.

> Wave after wave of bombers swept over the Island. They fought all day, coming down only to refuel and re-ammunition, taking on unimaginable odds. One machine was shot down, but the other three battled on in this fashion for two breath-taking months, when a squadron of Hurricanes came to their relief from England. Never before in its long history of assault had Malta seen so undaunted a defence: the inhabitants, peering out from the caves and tunnels at the three of them as they swooped against flights of ten, twenty and even fifty of the enemy, named them Faith, Hope and Charity.

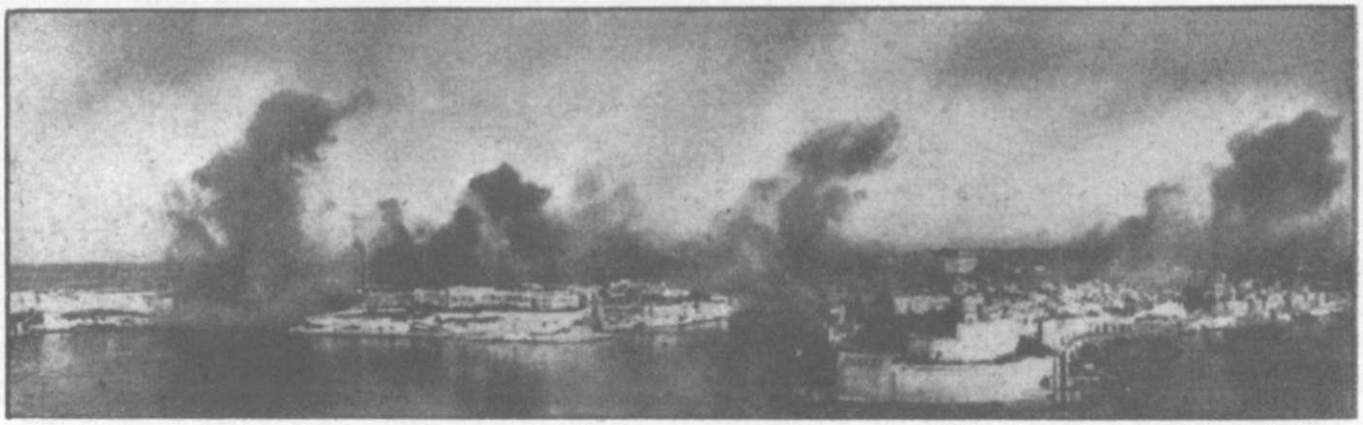
Then we have accounts of engagements and incidents which have already been described and pictured in our own pages, e.g. the Fleet Air Arm's swoop on Taranto of November 11, 1940, the bombing of the Illustrious, and the Battle of Matapan in March 1941. Little is added in this new account that affects the main outlines, but there is an occasional detail which adds colour to the narrative.

> By way of example, when in the early days of the war Commander H. St. L. Nicolson's four destroyers were being pursued by two Italian cruisers—they were hoping to entice the enemy to within range of H.M.S. Sydney's guns—the Hasty, who was last in the line, made a signal to the Hero, the next ahead. "Don't look round now," blinked her signal lamp, while Italian shells pitched round them in all directions, "but I think we are being followed."

Moving is the account of the end of the old monitor Terror, which had to be abandoned following tremendous dive-bombing attacks.

> For two months her squat form had wallowed through gales and sandstorms in offensive bombardments off the Libyan coast, while she covered with her 15-in. guns her venturesome brood of gunboats (Aphis, Ladybird, Gnat) in their assaults. The rifling of her guns grew so worn that the ton-weight projectiles somersaulted about the enemy encampments like skittles in a bowling alley before they finally exploded. She had been a sort of Universal Aunt to the advancing army, acting as water-carrier, supply vessel and repair ship. In the swiftly occupied harbours, where all was improvisation, hers was the only effective defence against the Luftwaffe. Let it be her epitaph that she had endured all things and done well.

A few days later the C.-in-C. was promoted to be a Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath. "I would rather," he said, when told of it, his mind on the little ships he had to send along that dive-bombed coast, "I would rather they had given me three squadrons of Hurricanes."



**VALETTA, capital of Malta, endured one of the most prolonged and savage onslaughts known to man. "Never before in its long history had Malta seen so undaunted a defence." Day after day, week after week, Italian aircraft dropped their bombs, but Malta became the world's most formidable fortress and, as the enemy knows to his cost, hit back with a vengeance. Here is a view of Valetta under a heavy air attack, great clouds of smoke rising above its ancient walls.** *Photo, Times of Malta*

# Night and Day the Great Russian Battle Goes On

**ALONG THE RUSSIAN FIGHTING LINE** on the Central sector. 1, Red Army men examine a German A.A. gun and standard, abandoned by a routed enemy unit. The photographs below were taken from an enemy source, and show phases of night-fighting. 2, Magnesium flare dropped from a plane reveals barbed wire entanglements in the No-man's land between Russian and German positions. In the foreground a machine-gun fires tracer ammunition. 3, The flash from a German howitzer illuminates the sky and snow-covered ground, providing sufficient light for the cameraman to photograph the scene.



*Photos, U.S.S.R. Official; Planet News*

# Carrier Pigeons Are Saving Our Men's Lives

Not the least of the many remarkable facts given in this article by J. M. MICHAELSON is that there are probably not less than a quarter of a million carrier pigeons now serving with our airmen and soldiers. Many have been wounded, many killed; but these gallant birds are maintaining a fine record of devoted service.

THREE lines in the newspapers recently announced the arrival of a draft of pigeons at an African base for the Middle East pigeon service. They have gone to reinforce the Army Carrier Pigeon Post which has done great work with the Eighth Army in North Africa. Specially trained men of the Royal Corps of Signals have worked with mobile lofts, and the birds have flown as truly and faithfully in the desert as in the more temperate climate of their English birthplace. Many have fallen victims to shells and bullets in the air and on the ground, and it is no doubt to replace these as well as to meet the needs of an expanding army that the reinforcements have gone out.

All the ingenuity of inventors has not made the carrier pigeon, one of the oldest methods of speedy, long-distance communication, obsolete. Telegraph and telephone wires can be cut; wireless transmitters can be damaged and, in any case, do not ensure secrecy. But the carrier pigeon will take a message quickly and secretly over a distance up to several hundred miles with almost unerring certainty. It was found that only five per cent of the many thousands of messages sent by pigeon in the First Great War failed to arrive.

The greatest enemy of the carrier pigeon is really bad weather. The homing instinct is so powerful that birds will struggle home against wind and rain, even if they fall dead in the loft. But sometimes they are beaten, and even in peacetime pigeon-races a percentage of birds was lost through bad conditions.

THE other enemies of the pigeon are hawks of various kinds, not very serious, and men with guns on the ground, whether enemy or friendly. The "friendly" man with a gun is usually a careless sportsman or a man with "trigger itch" who must shoot at anything that moves. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the greatest care should be taken in shooting at pigeons to make sure first that they are not carriers. They are easy to distinguish. The wood pigeon is grey with a white ring round its neck. The carrier is light brown, blue or red and white. The carrier flies on a straight course and does not even deviate at a man with a gun, whereas every experienced shot knows that a wood pigeon will swerve away at anything strange on the ground. The carrier rarely alights to rest or feed. It is also a smaller bird.

**SPECIAL CONTAINER** in which he carries a pigeon for taking messages forms part of this parachute trooper's equipment. As told in this page, pigeons prove of the greatest value in landing operations. *Photo, Sport & General*

There is really no excuse for mistaking the bird that is carrying a vital message for the pest of the countryside. But the error is made only too frequently, and casualties from guns in our own country are far heavier than from enemy action. Every person who goes shooting should know that thousands of carrier pigeons are flying over Britain every day. They are training, carrying messages between the various headquarters or from aircraft or raiding-parties round the coast.

**SAM, carrier pigeon attached to a Halifax bomber, was wounded in an R.A.F. raid over Berlin. A piece of A.A. metal pierced his canister and tore his beak. He is here shown with the damaged canister.** *Photo, Daily Mirror*

It is a crime to shoot a carrier and, I suppose, the average man when he finds he has made a "mistake" almost instinctively buries the evidence of his "crime." But by doing this he may imperil operations and lives. Anyone who shoots a carrier by accident or finds one dead or injured should take it to the police immediately. If it was an accident, no more will be said and, in any case, the police will be more concerned with seeing the message is delivered than with anything else. Undoubtedly airmen have lost their lives through carrier pigeons being shot down and the message never delivered.

When a pigeon has to fly over a battlefield there is always the chance of it being hit by bullets or splinters. But it takes a lot to kill a pigeon, and many struggle home with serious wounds. A curious fact is that they seem to take little notice of gunfire or—as in the Great War of 1914–1918—clouds of gas.

THE first news of the Dieppe raid last August was brought to Britain by a carrier pigeon. For reasons of secrecy, it was inadvisable to use wireless; and two pigeons were set free on Dieppe beach, each with the first news of the operations. One pigeon was almost immediately shot down, but the other, Beachcomber, flew through the hail of fire and reached H.Q. It averaged 50 m.p.h. Beachcomber was bred by Mr. E. King of Ipswich (*see* photo, page 529).

There have been many instances of birds being badly wounded and living to fly home. Most famous of First Great War pigeons, Mocker, lost an eye by a shell fragment in the Battle of the Argonne in 1918, but delivered the message and lived for another 20 years! An R.A.F. pigeon named Sam was "mentioned in dispatches" for courage when wounded in a Halifax bomber over Berlin. A shell fragment penetrated the metal container and tore the bird's beak, but Sam behaved well while being given first aid and will be on operations again soon.

Coastal Command aircraft have all carried pigeons since the outbreak of war. The success of the pigeon service led later to birds being carried on all bombers, and thousands are now engaged on this active service. Many pigeons, of course, make operational flights without even spreading their wings. They are not released except in emergency. Some have made up to 80 flights in aircraft, and are still fit and working. Others have been unlucky and killed or wounded severely by shell fragments while in the plane.

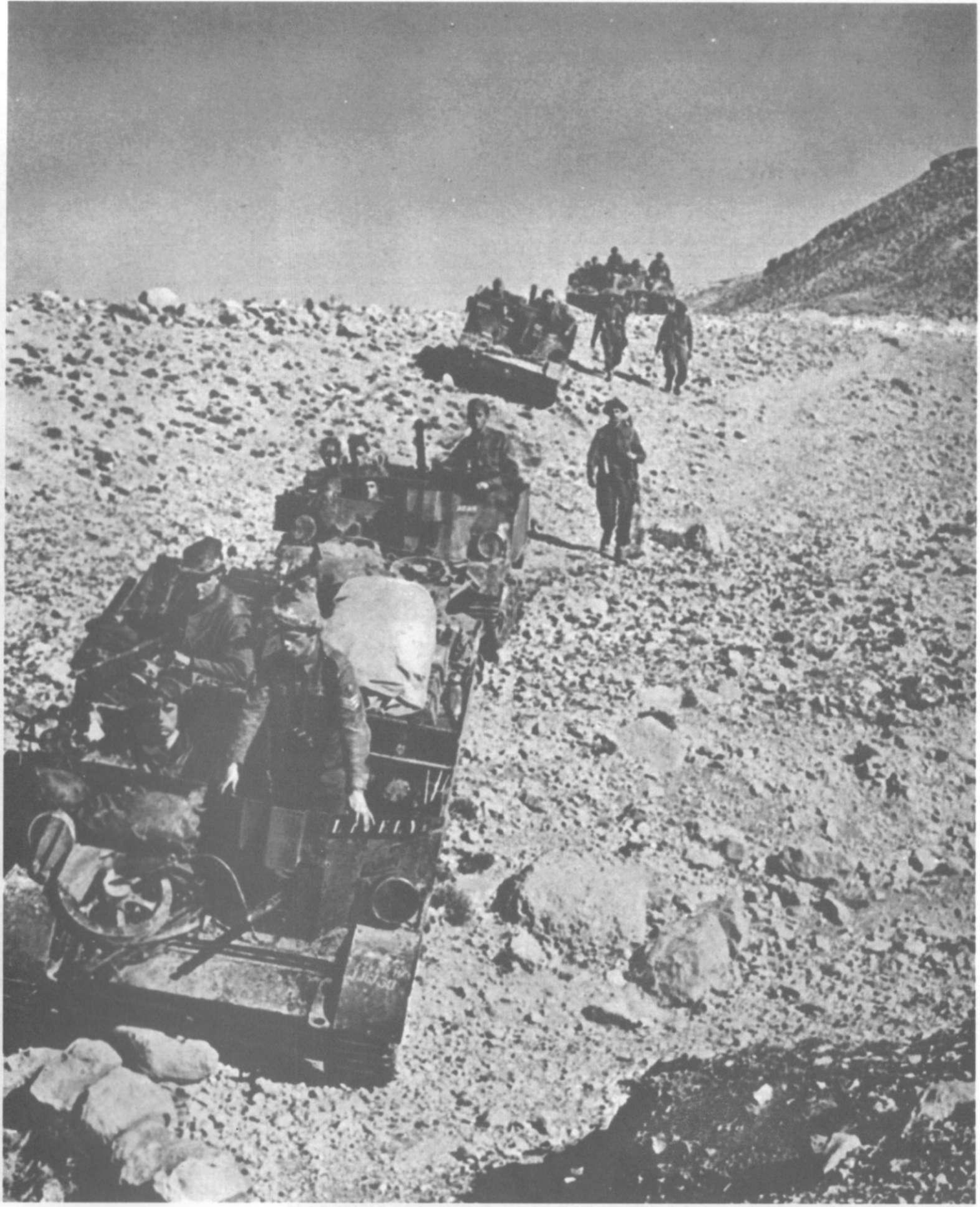
A typical incident showing the work of the birds with aircraft resulted in a bird called Winkie being awarded a bronze plaque. A Beaufort was forced down in the sea. As the crew scrambled into the dinghy, the wireless operator picked up the cage containing two pigeons. Somehow in the confusion one got away before a message had been attached. The other was released a few minutes later with a message giving the position. The bird carrying the message did not reach home. Perhaps it was shot down, perhaps it succumbed to the weather.

But the first bird reached its loft. When its owner, summoned by the tinkling of the bell rung automatically as a pigeon alights, found there was no message, he telephoned the number of the pigeon to the nearest R.A.F. station. They quickly identified the aircraft which had carried it, already overdue. Some clever calculating of the aircraft's probable course and the time of arrival of the pigeon resulted in an approximate area being marked on the map. Reconnaissance aircraft very soon spotted the dinghy; and less than 24 hours after the accident the crew were safely ashore.

MANY thousands of pigeons were "demobbed" after the First Great War, but the R.A.F. maintained a nucleus of birds through the years of peace, and they did good work in bringing aid to disabled planes.

How many pigeons are now in service can only be guessed, but the number available is probably not less than 250,000. Early in 1939, when the threat of war began to loom, the 50,000 British pigeon fanciers (including H.M. the King, who has fine lofts at Sandringham) offered their birds to the War and Air Ministries through the National Homing Union. Young pigeons are hatched in the spring, but require careful and expert training before they are reliable "homers." The present extensive pigeon service would have been quite impossible without the help of thousands of enthusiastic amateurs.

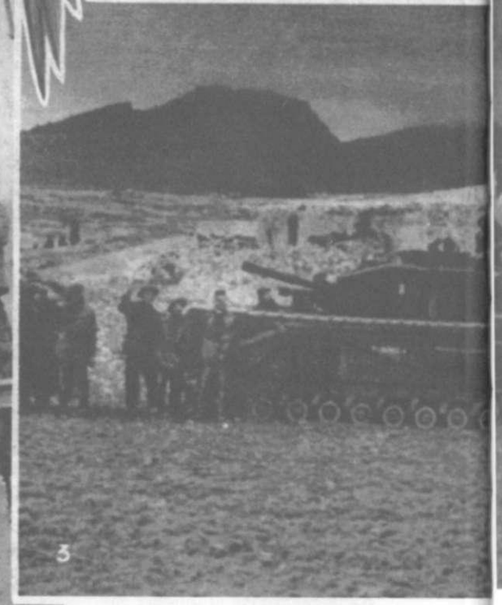
The most recent development of the Carrier Pigeon Post Service is with parachute troops. The pigeons, in special containers that prevent them being harmed, are dropped with the men, and can be immediately released with news of the landing or other operations. Here again they have the great advantage of secrecy, as wireless might reveal to the enemy the position of troops whose landing was still unknown to him.



*Photo, British Official: Crown Copyright*

## With Anderson's Men in Tunisia

Down the boulder-strewn slopes of a little river-bed, now as dry as an ancient bone, Bren-gun carriers of the Grenadier Guards push on as fast as the terrain permits in the wake of the retreating Germans. A few days before, towards the end of February 1943, it was Rommel's men who were doing the advancing; up the Kasserine Pass they surged, almost to Thala. Then their onset was stayed by U.S. troops, a British armoured brigade, the Hampshires, Coldstreams and Grenadiers.



## In a Cockpit of Sand and Rock

War in Tunisia is a strange mixture of big and little, of skirmishings and solitary patrols, of actions which can be described as battles. Our photographs reflect this military medley. 1, A German paratroop unearthed by a British Recce patrol. 2, Towing away a captured German 88mm. gun. 3, Churchill tanks of the 6th Armoured Division get ready to move to the support of the Guards near Sbiba. This action, fought on Feb. 2, 1943, was the Churchills' baptism of fire in North Africa.

Photos, Brit[ish] Official: Crown C[opyright]

## Flashes of Life in the Forward Zone

Whatever the exotic appeal of Algiers, life at the front in North Africa has a toughness, a rude simplicity. Messing is no easy matter, and such additions to the diet as this sergeant at a forward R.A.F. airfield is negotiating with an Arab huckster (4) are very welcome. Life is dangerous, too, as well as earnest; in (5) we see stretcher-bearers bringing in a casualty from No-man's land, while in (6) we are inconveniently close to an R.E. sergeant and sapper digging out an enemy mine.

## Old and New in North Africa

Photo, British Offi
Crown Copy

Illustrating just one of the many contrasts to be found nowadays in Tunisia, this tank passes a form of transport which might have been new generations ago. One of the many that have been repaired by the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at a mobile workshop belonging to this admirable service (see p. 692), the tank has been tested and is now being taken back to the front-line on a transporter by Reme's Delivery Squadron.

# VIEWS & REVIEWS

## Of Vital War Books

by Hamilton Fyfe

To those who believe that nations have characters, the French at this moment present a difficult problem. France—that is the French Government, so far as there is one—lends Hitler aid in every way possible, not only from fear but (it would seem) from inclination. Outside France there are Gen. de Gaulle's Fighting French who stand with us and hate their Vichyite fellow-countrymen as heartily as they hate the Boche. Then there is the great mass of French people in France who seem to be little interested one way or the other, only wanting apparently to be left alone to follow their occupations and get what comfort they can. Which of these three so sharply divided sections represents the French national character?

Some light on this is thrown by two books by French writers just published by the Oxford University Press: one is France, by Pierre Maillaud, the other *L'Autre Bataille de France*, by Jacques Lorraine (each costs 3s. 6d.). The first is a rather complacent review of French culture, recent history, types of character, divisions of opinion. To M. Maillaud the collapse of his country is merely "an episode." He cannot disguise from himself that defeat was due to "total disruption of authority and organization"; he rightly defends the French private soldier from the charge of having "lost his fighting qualities." But he considers both the generals and the politicians guilty of incompetence in preparing for war, and incapacity in conducting it when it started.

But it will not do to say that a nation is "sound" when it allows intriguers and incompetents to lead it to disaster, any more than an allotment-holder can say his soil is good if his vegetables are poor. Leaders grow out of nations, as vegetables grow out of soils. If in Britain's darkest hour there had been among us politicians ready to treat with the enemy, generals like Pétain and Weygand who groaned that it was no use going on, admirals of the Darlan sort who were eager to knuckle down—can anyone who knows anything about us doubt what would have happened to them? They would have been hanged on lamp-posts all the way down Whitehall.

M. Maillaud is inclined to excuse many of the French high-ups who were ready to collaborate with Hitler. He defends their arguments as "bearing some relation to elementary logic." The policy of France had been for centuries aimed at preventing German unity, but this unity was nevertheless accomplished: why not, then, accept that fact and join with the Germans in setting up a new State, a new Empire of the West? But is that really a line of argument adopted by the men of Vichy? Are they not supporters of Hitler because they believe in Hitlerism? Do they not prefer Fascism to Democracy? Are not their actions based on what they believe to be self-interest?

M. Lorraine is very clear about this. He divides those who have betrayed their country to the Boche into two categories—collaborators and collaborationists. The former want Hitler to win; the latter wanted to save France from his vengeance when he had won. Both lots thought he would win; both lost heart as soon as the collapse began. The first lot wished this collapse to begin; they had done all they could to weaken their country's effort, and their sole aim was to prevent war from being prolonged. The second lot longed to see the Nazis beaten, but they lacked the vigour and determination to stand up to the traitors.

Laval was the chief scoundrel in the sordid drama that ended French resistance. M. Lorraine gives a spirited account of the way he stopped Herriot and Jeanneney, Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, from leaving Bordeaux for French North Africa with President Lebrun's authorization, to carry on the government from there—and of course, to continue the war. Lebrun meant to go to North Africa too.

Herriot, Jeanneney, with many senators and deputies, were on board the vessel that was to take them to North Africa. They found Lebrun was missing. He had at the last moment, after endless shilly-shallying, hesitated, procrastinated, stayed behind. They went ashore hastily to find him. The ship left without them. The opportunity had been lost. Laval had won. The wretched old Pétain was in his pocket.

## The Fall of France In Retrospect

Laval took delight, it seemed, in declaring, "We have been thrashed. It's no use trying any more. We should only get a worse thrashing." Pétain agreed. At first he believed in his doting way that Hitler's terms were going to be "generous." It was put about by the Nazis that they had no wish to humiliate the French. Hitler supposed that, if he could stop French resistance, he could settle with Britain easily, and then turn to attack Russia. He had no idea of showing "generosity"; but it suited him to pretend that his terms would be reasonable, even easy. The French very soon found they were appallingly hard.

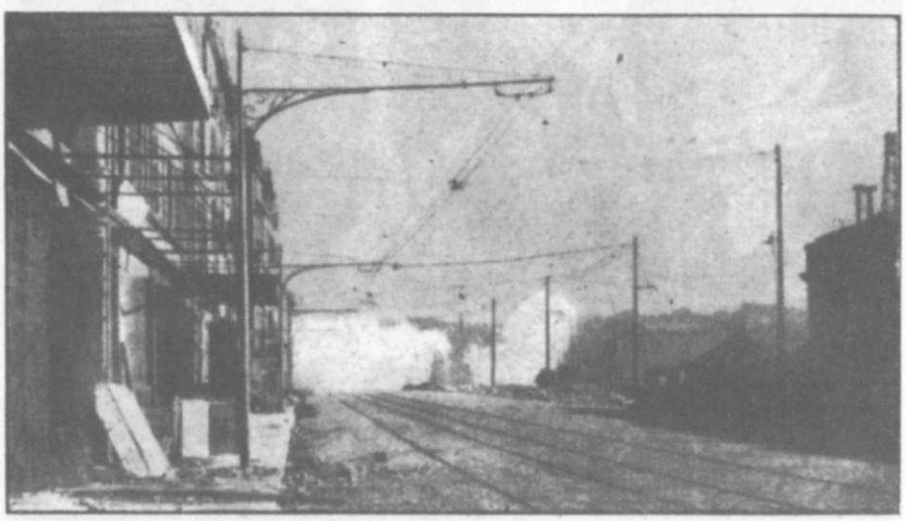
All who were their leaders at this moment, soldiers and politicians alike, believed that Britain was about to "have its neck wrung like a chicken." (You remember the Prime Minister's comment on that delusion in his speech at Ottawa—"Some chicken! Some neck!") When this did not happen, they did not say to themselves, "Now we must break loose from our bonds and stand up to Hitler again." They said on the contrary (M. Lorraine declares with justifiably savage indignation), "How can we help the Nazis to get the better of the British, in spite of their defeat in the Battle of Britain?"

Fortunately, they were not able to help a great deal. They did what they could, but they had the French traditional detestation of the Boche against them. A Nazi writer set out the advantages that the submission of France procured for his side. The French fleet was kept out of the war. North Africa could not be used as a base of Allied operations: that was, of course, before the landing there last November. The Americans were not installed at Bizerta. In addition, French workers produced enormous amounts of war material for Germany; and large numbers of skilled men went from France to work in German factories.

It is as refreshing to read M. Lorraine's fierce, biting French as it is disturbing to take note of the other writer's blindness to the lessons of the hour. M. Maillaud even hints that the disaster to the French army (which elsewhere he attributes correctly, as I have shown, to criminal unpreparedness and military folly) was due in some measure to British troops not being sent in large enough numbers. This, he adds, makes most Frenchmen feel that in giving up the fight they were not guilty of a breach of contract. Does he forget that the French Government gave an undertaking not to make a separate peace?

But M. Lorraine remembers this. He asks in poignant phrases what will be the fate of a France which has "lost the support and sometimes even the respect of foreigners, those foreigners who will tomorrow be setting the world in order." He urges the impossibility of "awaiting passively the victory of Germany's foes." The armistice, he shows, has done infinite harm, not only to us who were the allies of France but to the French themselves. For example, "hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen have died in prison camps of exhaustion, privations and hunger, and on French soil also." And all the torments the nation has suffered "have had only the result of postponing the defeat of the Germans and lowering France in the eyes of the world." There must come a moment, he declares, when the armistice will be "broken like glass."

The pretence of the Vichyites that defeat was necessary to end the decadence into which the French had been slipping, shows how low some members of this once proud and honourable people can fall. "Beaten, beaten, beaten!" wails the Victor of Verdun, yet he is still held in respect and veneration by the mass of the nation. Is it the French character which makes them judge men so perversely? Are they so simple as to be easily deceived? The whole "episode," as M. Maillaud calls it, is a riddle to which the answers are very difficult to find.



**MARSEILLES VIEUX PORT has been blown up by the Germans to make room for "a new and clean district"—and also a U-boat base. This ancient quarter of France's great Mediterranean city housed some 40,000 people, and on Feb. 24, 1943 the enemy began their mass evacuation. This photo shows buildings being demolished.** *Photo, Keystone*

# Knocked Out? Tanks Today Have Nine Lives!

Already in an earlier page we have described and pictured the work of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (see page 251), but here follows from the pen of ALEXANDER DILKE a fuller account, incorporating what has been revealed of the Corps' work in the Battle of Egypt and the subsequent pursuit of Rommel across North Africa.

IF you have 400 tanks and 200 are knocked out, how many have you left? It seems a simple sum in arithmetic. But the answer may well be 300 instead of the 200 which arithmetic suggests. The key to the mystery is "Reemee," slang name for Britain's youngest army corps, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, whose principal task it is to see that tanks knocked out are back in battle again as soon as possible. They had their baptism of fire in the Battle of Alamein and the pursuit that followed. Just how well they came through it is shown by the recently-revealed news that during the first month of the battle they repaired and put back in the battle no fewer than twelve hundred British tanks.

It is the ability of the modern tank to come back after being knocked out that explains why the figures for tanks put out of action given by both sides so often do not "add up." To avoid confusion, for instance, it should be explained that of the 1,200 tanks repaired and sent back into battle, many tanks appear more than once. They were repaired again and again after suffering damage from shells, mines, or simply breaking down through wear and tear.

In the earlier desert battles the advantage in this business of salving and repairing tanks was with the enemy. He had built up a fine organization—based upon British methods in the First Great War. On occasions after his armour had taken heavy punishment Rommel was able to strike back with surprising force because of his repair service. The lesson was learned by the British, and improved upon. Today "Reemee" works with a tenacity, skill and courage greater than the Germans have been able to show. None of the German "blitzes" has shown tanks in first-class condition after a fighting advance of over 1,000 miles.

A "child" of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, "Reemee" is responsible for all the work of repair and recovery of armoured vehicles, guns, wireless equipment, etc., in the field. It still depends upon the parent Corps for its supplies of spares, and this is no small business. There are 200,000 different items required for the repair of all types of tanks and vehicles, and 100,000 different items necessary for keeping in action and workable condition guns, wireless sets and engineering equipment. "Reemee" not only puts new caterpillars and engines into tanks on the field, but also repairs the most delicate optical equipment.

THE work of repairing is echeloned backwards from front line to base, and is as carefully planned and organized as a modern factory. Working in the front line are men with mobile workshops on lorries whose task it is to do the minor repairs. A tank is a very robust vehicle, but it contains many delicate mechanisms and may be put out of action by a small defect which can be repaired by experts in an hour or two—if they are there to do it.

Any tank requiring larger repairs goes back to the brigade workshops, further behind the lines. Workshop is, perhaps, a misleading word. In the desert it generally consisted of well-dispersed lorries and folding canvas shelters. The brigade workshops are mobile also to the extent that they move forward in leaps as the army advances. Giant transporter vehicles carry back tanks unable to proceed under their own power. On many occasions, the salvage and repair crews have shown great gallantry in pulling out tanks under the very nose of the enemy, often working in total darkness with nervous machine-guns sweeping the area.

Behind the brigade workshops are the divisional workshops. Here a tank can be fitted with a complete new engine, a new gun and, in fact, brought into battleworthy condition again after serious damage. Finally, there are base workshops, as solid and elaborately equipped as the factories that built the tanks. But comparatively few of the tanks go back beyond divisional workshops. Base workshops also do a big business in reconditioning batteries and tires. When every item has to be transported many thousands of miles through dangerous seas, the importance of salvage and reconditioning is vitally realized. Tanks so badly damaged as to be not worth repairing are stripped down for spare parts or, on occasions, two tanks are "synthetized" to produce a single new one.

Craftsmen and engineers of every kind are to be found in these workshops—welders, turners, blacksmiths, electricians, carpenters, radio engineers, armourers. And always they are working at top speed, for every hour that a tank or other vehicle is out of action means just so much less power to be brought against the enemy. In the heat of battle, tanks which can be rapidly got back into action get priority. Lulls give the men a chance to catch up on work on other vehicles.

IF there is a probability of a tank being put back into action in a matter of hours, its crew stay with it. But if it has to go back to divisional workshops, its crew leave it and are given another. When the tank is repaired it goes into the general "pool" from which tanks are issued.

The worst enemy of these men who have to keep the tanks moving has been not the Germans but the sand. It gets into everything; and although special precautions are taken against it, nothing can prevent the sand from causing certain parts of the tank to wear out very much more quickly than they do in Britain. Provision for this had to be made in estimating the number of spare parts required and sent out.

"Reemee," having come with flying colours through its first great battle, is now preparing for an even bigger one—the invasion of Europe. Thousands of armoured vehicles and tanks will take part, and it will be "Reemee's" task to keep them fighting fit. Far in advance, its staff must plan where it will set up its base, divisional and other workshops, and what machinery and spares it will need. Standardization has, to a degree, simplified the task, not only by reducing the variety of spare parts required, but also by limiting the variety of breakdown causes. Different tank types, like different makes of motor-car, tend to develop different defects in action, and the repair experts quickly get into the habit of looking for them.

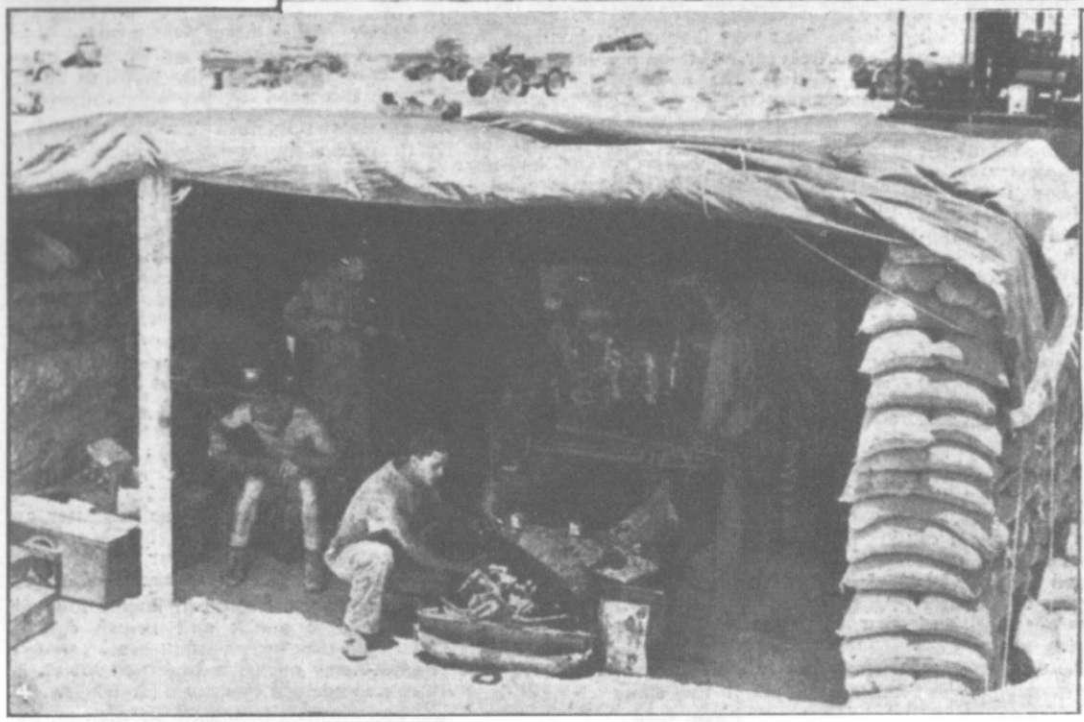
The men who keep the tanks moving have played a very important if unspectacular part in the great victory in North Africa. They would be the first to say that they have been able to send the tanks in to fight again and again only because of the workmanship put into them in British factories. To those thousands of men and women in Britain engaged in making tanks it must be immensely satisfactory to know that they are maintained by a body of men who are as courageous and skilled as those who fight with them in battle.

R.E.M.E., as told in this page, has contributed magnificently to the fighting success of our tanks in Libya and Tripolitania. Thanks to this Corps' high speed repair service, 8th Army tanks and armoured vehicles pursued the Afrika Korps in a non-stop drive. Mechanics are here shown at work on a Crusader tank. *Photo, British Official*

# Thanks to R.E.M.E. the Army Keeps On Moving

**IN NORTH AFRICA** the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (see page 251) have repaired some thousands of Army vehicles and recovered and "salvaged" scores of tanks since they began operations on October 1, 1942. These photographs illustrate some of R.E.M.E.'s activities during crucial phases of the fighting in the Western Desert and Tripolitania, in some of the worst conditions mechanized transport has ever been called upon to surmount.

1, Fitting hauling tackle to a disabled General Grant tank, preparatory to shifting it on to the transporter. 2, Removing a damaged tank in a Libyan forward area during heavy enemy air attacks. The tank has been safely hauled on to the transporter despite bombs bursting in the background. It was subsequently taken to a workshop, repaired and sent into action again.



**DESERT WORKSHOPS** of the 8th Army are fitted with the most up-to-date machinery, spare parts and repair equipment of every kind. Among the craftsmen whose job it is to repair vehicles are fitters, blacksmiths, turners, welders, armourers, instrument-makers, radio engineers, electricians, carpenters, etc. Each of these men is an expert at his particular job.

Above (3) is shown a busy scene at a blacksmith's shop. These craftsmen are hard at work all day. In addition to the pitiless glare of the desert they endure the heat of their furnaces as they labour at vital tasks of repairing guns and tanks. 4, The main workshop of this improvised blacksmith's shop is dug firmly into the sand, and effectively protected and camouflaged. The camouflage gives shade as well as protection.

*Photos, British Official: Crown Copyright*

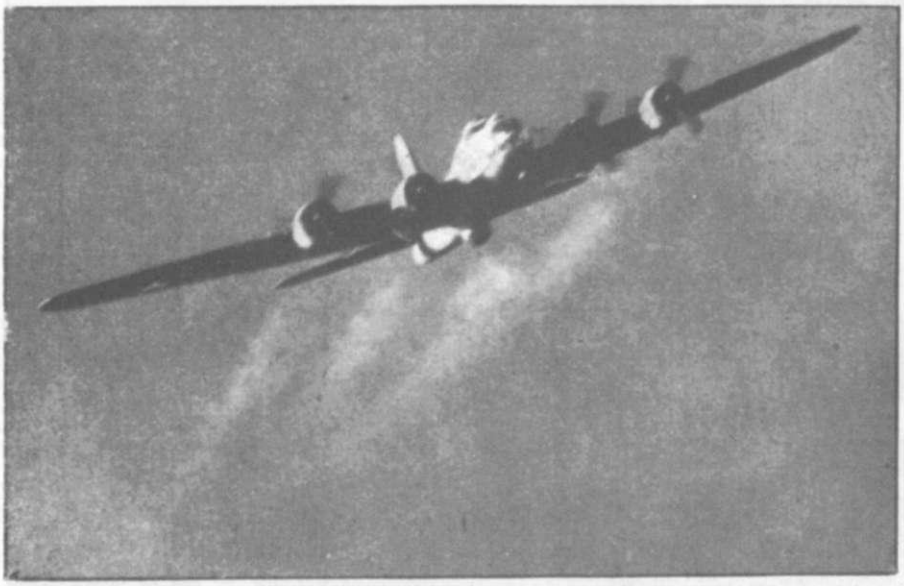
# THE WAR IN THE AIR

by Capt. Norman Macmillan, M.C., A.F.C.

FORTRESS and Liberator bombers of the United States Army Eighth Air Force based in Britain attacked with bombs in daylight the important submarine-building yards at Vegesack, near Bremen, on March 18, 1943. For this raid into north-western Germany the American bombers had to fight their way through Dutch and German skies. The engagement lasted two hours, probably the longest air battle of its kind in history.

The result was an operational triumph for American methods of day bombing. Only two bombers were lost. Fifty-two enemy fighters were destroyed, and 43 were probably damaged or destroyed. (*See* eye-witness account in page 701.)

This is a shattering blow for the Luftwaffe. They have been unable to prevent the growing night raids of the R.A.F. Here is a demonstration that they cannot protect the Reich in daylight.



**FLYING FORTRESS of the 8th U.S.A.A.F. heading for a target in N.W. Germany ; just noticeable are the four separate condensation trails thrown off by the great machine as it speeds on its way. Daylight attacks by these formidable aircraft on enemy territory have been extraordinarily successful—one of the most remarkable being that inflicted on Vegesack (see pages 701 and 702.)**

*Photo, British Official : Crown Copyright*

The success of the American bombers is not due solely to their weight of fire from half-inch machine-guns (as many seem to think), and to the excellent shooting of the air-gunners. Part of their success must be ascribed to their technical design for the specific purpose of high-level precision bombing. They are equipped with turbo-supercharged engines, which give a high power-output at height. The Fortress II has the curved fin surface and enlarged tail of the stratoliner ; this alone indicates that it is a higher flying aircraft than the Fortress I, which had a maximum speed of 325 m.p.h. at 20,000 feet and a service ceiling of 36,700 feet. (The service ceiling is that height at which an aeroplane climbing at full throttle ascends at a maximum rate of 100 feet per minute.)

It has been stated in America that the 1941-type Fortress reaches 330 m.p.h. at 30,000 feet. Flying heights and speeds of aircraft vary according to the loads and kinds of equipment they are required to carry, but if these figures are anywhere near the true performance of the Fortresses when they raid Germany, it explains why they are able to defeat the German fighters in daylight as they do.

The F.W. 190 has a top speed of about 370 m.p.h. at 19,000 feet. The Me. 109F does about 370 at 22,000 feet, and the Me. 110 about 340 at 22,000 feet. The top speed of these fighters begins to fall above these heights, whereas that of the Fortress increases.

Even though the Fortresses do not travel at their top speed but cruise in formation, there can be only a slight speed advantage to the German fighters when they have to engage the American bombers above their own maximum efficiency levels. The ability of the German fighters to overhaul the bombers is reduced, their power of manoeuvre curtailed. If they are to close to accurate shooting range, the fighters must fly straight into the volume of fire from the whole bomber formation. Under these conditions, relative fire-power favours the bombers, for the Fortress carries eleven half-inch machine-guns against the contemporary German fighter's armament of eight rifle-calibre machine-guns or from two to four 20-millimetre cannon-guns and from two to four rifle-calibre machine-guns. The half-inch machine-gun's range is at least as good as that of the 20-millimetre cannon-gun. And it appears that at bombing height the German fighters are not fast enough to break through the fire-power of the American bombers.

IT was one of Napoleon's maxims to choose the battle-ground that suited himself and offered disadvantage to the enemy. American military air strategists and aeronautical engineers sought this condition in the air, and the aircrews have demonstrated that it applies there too.

Attacking Wilhelmshaven naval base on March 22, the American bombers destroyed 28 German fighters, with a further 18 probably destroyed or damaged ; they lost three of their own aircraft.

Including the two raids mentioned, the Americans have made 51 raids since they first went into action, when they bombed Rouen with 12 machines on August 17, 1942. During this period they claim to have shot down 356 German aircraft, for a loss of fewer than 90 bombers.

Technical improvements are in continued development, including new bombers able to carry four times the load of today, and a long-range fighter. In addition to the armour on the aircraft, personal armour is being provided to protect aircrews against flak and small-bore ammunition.

THE American conception of the value of air power is summed up in the telegram sent by General MacArthur to Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, British Chief of Air Staff, who had telegraphed the congratulations of the R.A.F. to the American general on the victory of the Bismarck Sea. General MacArthur said : "The infinite possibility of the strategic application of air power is not even yet fully understood or comprehended. In proper co-ordination it opens up horizons of application not yet explored. Therein lies the way to victory, if we have sufficient constructive imagination to seize the opportunity."

What is described as one of the greatest battles of the War was fought during five days of February when twenty U-boats attacked a convoy in the North Atlantic. From bases in Iceland, North Ireland, and the Hebrides, Sunderland and Catalina flying-boats and Fortress and Liberator landplanes flew out in foul weather to act in close liaison with the escort ships of the Royal Navy, and the convoy was brought through "with comparatively small loss." Thousands of miles were flown in less than four days. Ten U-boat sightings and seven air attacks were made ; some U-boats were bombed from only 30 ft up. (*See* p. 680.)

### WHIRLWINDS and Mosquitoes Haunt the Nazi Skies

Three De Havilland Mosquito long-range fighters encountered Junkers 88s over the Bay of Biscay, 60 miles out from the Gironde estuary, and destroyed both. The report of the encounter on March 22 was the first disclosure of the conversion of this fast day-bomber into a fighter. Fighter Command has recently been using its former Whirlwind fighter as a light day and night bomber. On March 14 Whirlwinds bombed Maupertus and Abbeville airfields ; on March 22 targets in Holland, rail targets near Armentieres, and canal barges near Lille ; on March 25 the railway yards at Abbeville ; on the nights of March 20-21 and 21-22 they bombed the Morlaix railway viaduct approach to submarine bases (*see* illus. p. 696) ; and on March 22-23 went for rail targets in Brittany. All attacks were made without loss. A British long-range intruder fighter was over Bremen on the night of March 23-24 ; this is an important development.

MEANWHILE Bomber Command was handicapped by fog and mist. Aircraft laid mines on the nights of March 13-14 and 23-24, losing four aircraft. On March 22-23 St. Nazaire submarine base was attacked by nearly 300 four-engined bombers, one of which was lost ; the others had to be shepherded back by Flying Control, the R.A.F. ground organization responsible for the safety of aircraft in flight. On the night of March 26-27 the Ruhr (Duisburg) was bombed, and the following night Berlin received its heaviest raid to date with 900 tons of bombs.

Bomber Command day attacks (with Venturas and Mosquitoes) were made against St. Brieuc airfield (March 15) ; rail workshops at Paderborn (March16) ; Maasluis, near Rotterdam (March 18 and 22) ; railway at Leer, N.W. Germany, by one Lancaster, and rail targets at Louvain by Mosquitoes (March 20) ; loco. works near Nantes (March 23); rail targets in N.-W. Germany (March 24).

Air activity increased in Burma following the Japanese attack and British counter-attack on the Arakan front. In Tunisia the Eighth Army offensive, begun on March 20, was accompanied by intense air activity.

# The R.A.F. Celebrates Its 25th Birthday

**OUR BIGGEST RAID ON BERLIN** was carried out on March 27, 1943, when Lancasters, Halifaxes and Stirlings (nine of which were missing) dropped over 900 tons of bombs—double the tonnage unloaded in the enemy's deadliest attack on London on April 16, 1941. Great fires were left burning on both sides of the Spree. Here are pilots and crews of Lancaster bombers photographed after returning to their base. Another raid on the German capital was made two days later.

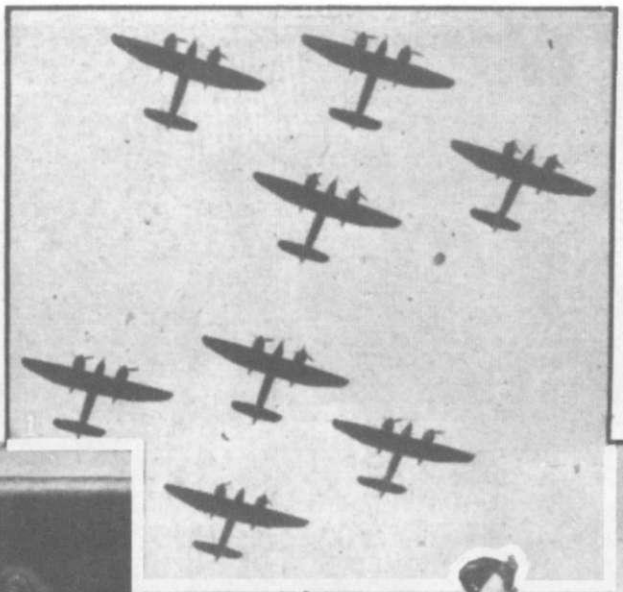


*Photo, New York Times Photos*

# On Morlaix Viaduct Dived the Whirlwinds

MORLAIX, ancient town of Brittany, and in pre-War days a famous resort for artists, became an important target for Whirlwind bombers of Fighter Command on the nights of March 20 and 21, 1943. The picturesque little town is dominated by a two-tiered viaduct, 310 yards in length and 200 feet in height, carrying the main railway line between Paris and Brest (the latter being one of the most vital U-boat centres) over the rivers Queffleut and Jariot. This viaduct was attacked by a force of Whirlwinds on both occasions.

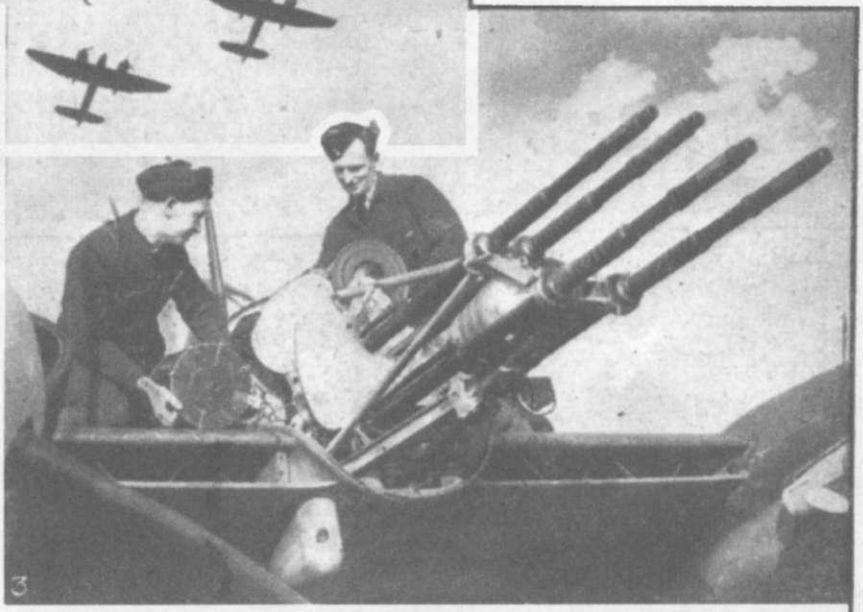
In spite of intense flak the aircraft flew in low, and several effective hits were obtained on the target. After the first raid a fire was left burning on the viaduct, and during the second attack two railway bridges on a main German supply line in the area were also bombed with noticeable success.



WHIRLWIND fighter-bombers, which have scored so many successes against the enemy during ceaseless day and night raids, are as fast as the Spitfire and can blaze 600 shells a minute from their four cannon. Each machine carries two 250-lb. bombs under the wings. Enemy sources credit the Whirlwind with a top speed of 353 m.p.h. at 16,350 ft. It has a span of 45 ft., is 31 ft. 6 in. in length, and has a height of 11 ft. 6 in.

Powered by two Rolls-Royce Peregrine engines, this aircraft mounts formidable armament in the rounded nose of the fuselage in the shape of four 20-mm. Hispano cannon—a type which has been used with great effect against ground targets in France and elsewhere. During a period of six months a Whirlwind Squadron destroyed or damaged 37 goods trains in enemy-occupied territory.

2



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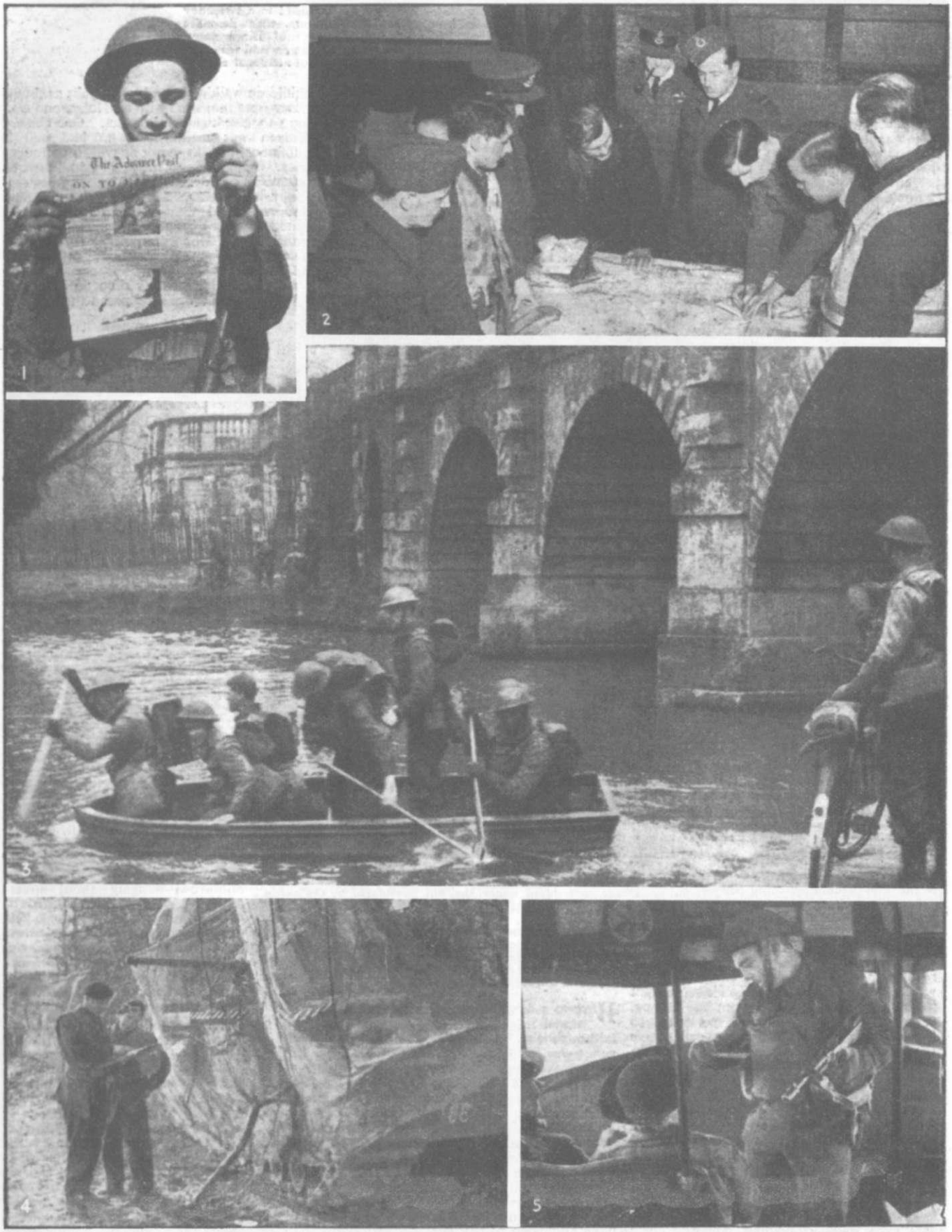
4

**GERMAN COMMUNICATION LINES** were seriously disrupted by the Whirlwind bombers' attack on the Morlaix viaduct. 1, Whirlwinds flying in "box" formation. 2, Loading one of the aircraft with a 250-lb. bomb preparatory to the raid. 3, Part of the Whirlwind's effective armament; loading up the four 20-mm. Hispano cannon. 4, The Place Thiers at Morlaix, with the viaduct—chief target of the Whirlwinds in their raids last March—spanning the town in the background.



*Photos, P.N.A., Topical Press, E.N.A.*

# Invaders of Tomorrow Pass McNaughton's Test




**ANOTHER 'BATTLE OF BRITAIN' was waged recently in the largest military exercise ever held in this country. Armies clashed in mock combat on a wide front in a scheme that presupposed a British-Canadian force, "Southland," commanded by Lt.-Gen. McNaughton, attempting to advance against the "Germans," represented by the "Eastland" Army. 1, Both sides had their own field newspapers. This Southlander scans The Advance Post. 2, Pilots of an R.A.F. Composite Group being interrogated after bombing operations. 3, Canadian infantry crossing the Thames at Oxford; the bridge was "destroyed" by the enemy. 4, Tank commander and driver check up a route before setting off. 5, A Canadian inspects bus passengers' identity cards. After the "battle" Gen. McNaughton said that it had been the finest possible training, and he was satisfied with the land operations. The bridging in particular was magnificent.**



*Photos, British Official: Crown Copyright*

# Youth in a Britain of Bombs and Black-out

For much of the information contained in this article we are indebted to a twopenny pamphlet, Youth in a City, recently published by the Board of Education, which describes an experiment of Youth Service in the Sherbourne Road district of Birmingham. Remarkable as it is, however, this venture is but one of many aiming, in general with very encouraging results, at the enlistment of the spirit of youth in the cause of national service.

BLACK-OUT time in a much-bombed district of Birmingham! As soon as it got dark, immediately after tea that is, it was the custom of the young people of those close-packed streets and alleys to take their pillows and blankets and queue up at the entrance to the public air-raid shelter. "Booking a place" for the family by parking the bedding, they waited till father and mother came to the shelter; then out they went into the dark streets to join their chosen mates. The boys hung about doorways or at street-corners, talking and fooling, the girls strolled from street-corner gang to street-corner gang; both made themselves a nuisance to the neighbours and passers-by, and often they joined forces in doing malicious damage, for which there was plenty of scope in a district which had been so heavily bombed—but this was not the worst aspect of black-out time. The really serious danger came later in the evening when the boys and girls paired off before going home. Morale and morals were reported to be exceedingly bad.

Altogether they constituted a serious problem; but fortunately there were those in Birmingham who had the guts and gumption to tackle it. Under the leadership of Mr. J. J. Hegan, principal of one of the city's evening institutes, a little band of social workers opened in May 1941 the Sherbourne Road Centre on the first floor of a redundant senior school. The immediate purpose was to provide a place where young people at a loose end could meet and also an opportunity for them to do something of value to themselves during their leisure, while at the same time developing their character and improving their morale. Classes were begun in singing, dancing, woodwork, and physical training, and clubs were started—a model aeroplane club, concert party, dramatic society—all managed by the members themselves and, so far as possible, self-supporting.

IN the first week 135 young people enrolled. The gangs responded reasonably well to the invitation to come in, but quite a number joined with the intention of wrecking the venture. And they almost did so. The first four weeks were a nightmare. Young rowdies climbed up the water-pipes, swung on the electric-light fittings and pulled them from the ceiling. Gang leaders expected to be permitted to break all the rules of the games or to have them altered so that they could win; when they lost the billiard-cue was flung to the floor, the table-tennis bat deliberately smashed. But Mr. Hegan and his stalwarts made good. Before very long these boys and girls from the dull and dingy little houses in those back streets were discovered taking the keenest of interest in all the varied activities of the Centre. The young gangsters worked off their surplus energy in boxing and wrestling, the street-corner girls learnt first-aid and nursing, homecraft and needlework. Some even took to reading books. The general reading level (we are told) was very low; few read at all, some read only the penny "comic"; only three had current City Library tickets, and eight were members of the twopenny libraries.

When the Centre first opened, most of the members were dirty, untidy and ill-mannered. Four girls and two boys, indeed, were excluded because they were verminous. Many came to the Centre in their working clothes, and few washed before coming. This was understandable since few of the members have baths in their homes, and they can't be bothered to wait in the queues at the public baths. Now the boys can take hot showers at the gymnasium in the Centre one evening a week, but the girls are less fortunate. The custom is for them to have a full wash in the kitchen on Friday evening, if and when fathers and brothers go out. The girls state that overtime and late return cause the male movements to be erratic as to time, and if the coast is not clear—no bath! But soon it is hoped that the baths at the Centre will be open every night; it is hoped, too, that the members will bring their own towels.

**IN CORFE, ancient Dorset town of about 1,400 inhabitants—how different from the Birmingham described in this page!—children bring salvage to a dump under the hill dominated by the castle, ruined in the Civil War 300 years ago.** *Photo Daily Mirror*

BEYOND a doubt Birmingham is not exceptional in this matter of juvenile gangs (although it may be exceptional in the courageous way in which it was tackled). In every city, in every town, in many a village even, there are crowds of young people who have been cut or cast adrift from their moorings. School finishes at fourteen, and even this all too short schooling has been sadly interfered with by the bombing. Parental control has lessened. In hundreds of thousands of little homes Dad is in the Army, and Mum is on munitions. And when in their middle teens the young people go out into the world they are welcomed with open arms by employers willing and eager to pay 30s., £2, £3 a week for unskilled labour. From time to time there are reported in the papers cases of youths earning very much more than this; and an official at the Home Office recently spoke of children walking in and out of jobs as though they were film stars with all Hollywood waiting to give them a contract. One child of fifteen was mentioned who had had 75 different jobs, as many as two in one morning. (Although, on the other hand, there are numbers of boys and girls working disgracefully long hours. Some come to the Sherbourne Road Centre utterly tired out, so tired that they cannot talk or read for some time. "A," for instance, age 18, who is at work at 4.30 a.m., reaches home at 4.30 p.m., has tea, then delivers newspapers and helps in his father's shop until about 7 p.m., when he goes to the Centre.)

IS it any wonder that juvenile delinquency is on the increase?

Comparing the year ended March 1942 with the last pre-war year the number of cases of larceny and other offences in which boys of school age were concerned increased over the whole country by 51 per cent; for London boys alone the increase was 14 per cent. For boys of over school age (14+ to 16+) the increase in London cases was 21 per cent, as against the whole country's 38 per cent. Cases of girls of school age increased 121 per cent in London, the increase for the whole country being 83 per cent; while the corresponding figures for girls over school age showed increases of 116 and 125 per cent.

Thousands of boys and girls are charged with larceny every year: thefts of articles from cars, thefts of bicycles, thefts from multiple stores. The London figures show that the number of offences was lowest in the 8-year-old group, increasing progressively with each year's age group until the peak is reached with the 16-year-old boys and girls. Nearly half the offences are committed by boys and girls of 15 and 16 years of age.

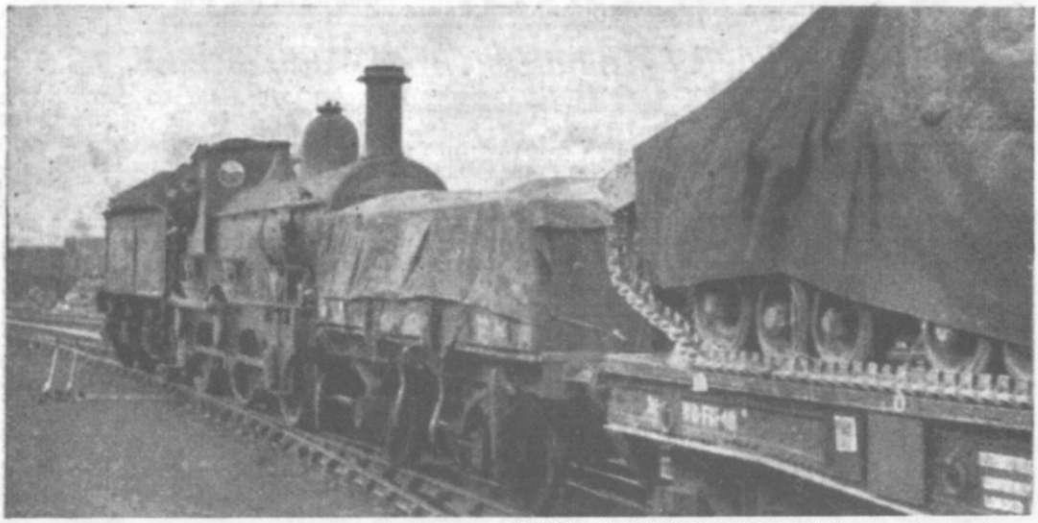
From the statistics it would seem clear that great numbers of young people of both sexes are running wild. That boys should do so is perhaps to be expected—"boys will be boys"—and the consequences in after-life may not be too serious or too lasting. But with the other sex it is different; and the deepest concern must be felt at the spectacle of young girls, the mothers of tomorrow, hanging about street-corners or on the outskirts of military camps and barracks. Perhaps it is the romantic appeal of uniform; perhaps war affects in some strange way the chemistry of the body. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that precocious girls of 15 or 16, even younger, constitute a danger to their own and to others' physical and mental health.

To put it in a nutshell, Youth is a handful. But we have learnt how to treat this problem in social hygiene. That Birmingham Centre we have described is on the right road; so, too, are the many Youth organizations which have been in being for many years—the Scouts and Girl Guides, for instance, the Boys' Brigade, the Church Lads' Brigade—and those which have been launched quite recently with a definitely military backing—the Air Training Corps, the Girls' Training Corps, and the Cadet Force. Given something to belong to, a uniform to put on, a "gang" one mustn't let down whatever happens—given these, and the Youth problem born of war conditions, bombing and the black-out, the evacuations and the broken-up homes, has found its answer. Britain's "dead-end kids" are becoming the good citizens of tomorrow.

E. ROYSTON PIKE

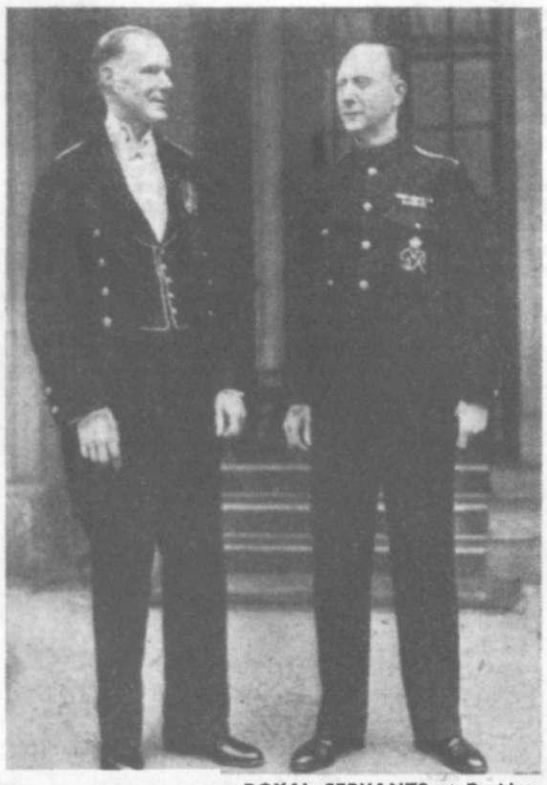
# Our Roving Camera Roams the Home Front

**NEW CAPS FOR NURSES** of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service have wide peaks and are light grey. They will replace the present Q.A.I.N.S. hats when the latter are worn out, and will save thousands of yards of material.

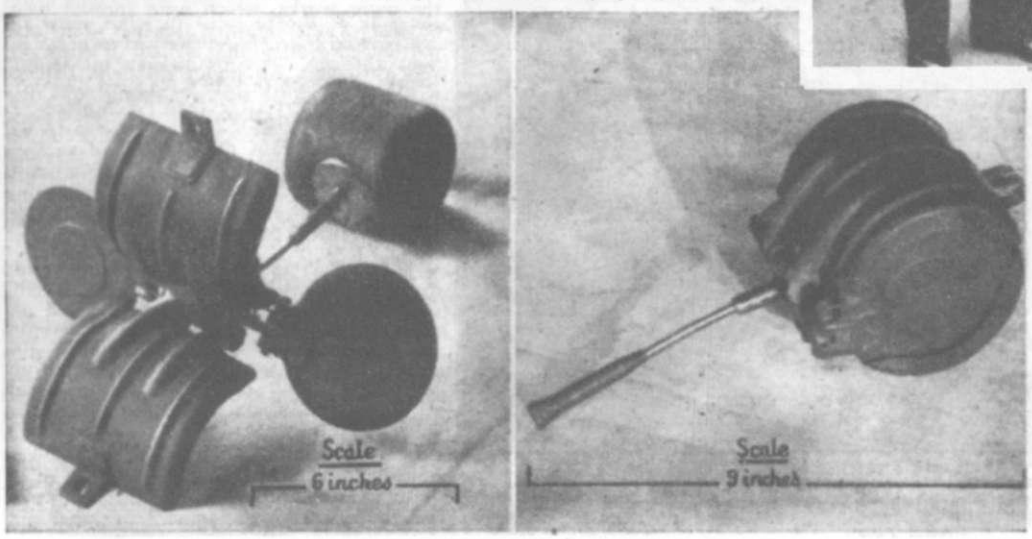


**BRITAIN'S OLDEST LOCOMOTIVE** on regular service, L.M.S. engine No. 20002, is 77 years old. Her mileage on Feb. 1, 1943 was 1,580,436. This veteran—in her day one of Britain's fastest engines—carried troops in the Boer War and during the conflict of 1914-18. She is now engaged in hauling loads of tanks and guns, and has achieved a fine record of work during the present war.

**ROAST-POTATO STALL** at Blackburn, Lancashire, does a brisk trade. War workers and schoolchildren crowd round Ivy Rossi, the owner of the stall. Until they were called-up her four brothers earned their living by selling roast potatoes. The Ministry of Food has urged everybody to "Eat more Potatoes," substituting them wherever possible for bread and thus releasing vital shipping space now taken up by imported wheat.



**ROYAL SERVANTS** at Buckingham Palace and other Royal residences have gone into "battledress." The King ordered a new style of livery to save materials. In place of tail-coat, waistcoat, stiff white shirt and collar, the servants wear dark blue "battle blouses." John Ainslie, the Palace steward, is shown above wearing the new livery; on his right is a Palace footman in the old attire.




**GERMAN ANTI-PERSONNEL BOMBS**, a number of which has been dropped recently in this country, are painted greyish-green or yellow, and may explode at the slightest touch. Each weighs about 4 lb. The casing, when open, expands into 4 hinged portions at the end of the wire (left); right-hand photo, bomb with its outer casing shut.

*Photos, British Official; Keystone Daily Mirror, Planet News*

# I WAS THERE! Eye Witness Stories of the War

## *We Formed Human Pyramids to Cross Wadi Zigzau*

**A young British major with a bullet embedded an inch above his heart continued to lead his men at the storming of Wadi Zigzau, in the first stage of the Mareth Line attack. Paul Bewsher, Daily Mail Special Correspondent with the Eighth Army, describes here his meeting with the gallant officer, and the major tells his own thrilling story.**

BARE to the waist, he sat in the marquee of a field dressing station. All round him were unshaven Germans in dirty grey-green uniforms, receiving treatment. Tired and drawn, but still full of enthusiasm, this dark, lean-faced man from Taunton, Somerset, who won the Military Cross at El Alamein, described his men's heroism—without ever mentioning his own.

"Alamein was child's play compared to this," he said, as he drank hot tea and munched sardines and biscuits. "Our objective was a strong-point known as Ksiba Ouest just across the Wadi Zigzau. We knew from the maps and aerial photographs that it consisted of pillboxes with machine-gun nests round it, and we had rehearsed the whole operation as far as we could.

"After dark we gathered about half a mile this side of the wadi. While we were waiting we came under heavy shell-fire and machine-gun fire from both sides. Then to the second down came our own barrage, dropping heavy concentrations of shells on enemy positions right in front of us. For 20 minutes they came over. Then it was zero hour for our attack.

"Like clockwork those guns began laying a creeping barrage in front of us. It was a perfect, magnificent piece of work. Not one shell fell on our own men. Engineers had driven a path through the minefields, and we reached the near side of the wadi without meeting any enemy troops.

"It was full moon and very bright. The wadi is a very wide gully, with precipitous sides, and there were scaling ladders available if necessary. We all managed to slither down into the wadi. Crossing it was not very pleasant. Machine-gun fire and mortar shells came from both sides.

"But we got across all right. When we got to the other side we decided to climb to the opposite bank by forming human pyramids, which we had practised. You know—three sturdily-built men standing at the bottom, two more get on their shoulders, another man gets on top again, and the rest clamber over the top of the cliff. When everybody else is up except the pyramid men, they can be pulled up with rope if necessary.

"My men carried out this task splendidly, despite really fierce fire in the wadi. We went forward. Fire was coming at us from all sides. Then we had another obstacle to get through. There was a deep anti-tank ditch beyond the wadi, but we got across this by making human pyramids again.

"We found ourselves about 600 ft. to the left of Ksiba Ouest, our objective. The enemy opened very heavy fire with machine-guns and rifles from three concrete pillboxes. Gradually we worked towards them. The whole position was surrounded by a deep ditch, and barbed wire and mines were scattered about.

"We reached the wire, cut a way through, and dropped into the ditch." The speaker stopped, drank more tea, and said: "Hope I'm not talking too much. I've been having morphia, you know." I assured him he was not, and he went on: "Once we were in that ditch we started throwing hand grenades and put some pretty accurate rifle fire and machine-gun fire against those pillboxes.

"Suddenly they packed up. They just gave in. Out of the pillboxes men came pouring. We took 200 of them prisoners, and there were only 80 of us. The majority were Italians, but they included a number of Germans.

"They told us other Germans had driven away in the afternoon. One of the Italians was a doctor, so I let him dress my wound, which I had not had time to worry about before. Then we dug ourselves in all round the post. Men in my party put up a grand show. The whole job was done in three hours and we had very few casualties."

I asked him when he received that wound. "Oh, while we were waiting to start," he said casually. "But as I knew all about the job I thought I should go through with it."

## *At Hegra We Norwegians Held the Nazis at Bay*

**Three years ago, on April 9, Nazis landed at Trondheim and took the Norwegians by surprise. Not until now—upon the escape of Lieut.-Col. Holtermann—has the full story been told of how the beleaguered garrison of Hegra Fortress stood out, alone, for four weeks, against the might of the Wehrmacht. Here is the Commanding Officer's own dramatic story of the epic battle fought amid the Norwegian snows.**

IT had originally been my intention only to occupy the camp west of the fortress in order to continue mobilization, as I assumed that the Norwegian forces in Inntröndelag, together with British and French troops, would soon advance southward in order to recapture Vaernes and Trondheim. It soon became clear, however, that that advance might be delayed and that I would be forced to stay at Hegra for some time. I therefore decided to occupy the fortress itself.

Hegra Fortress was built in 1907 as a frontier fort facing Sweden, but it was closed in 1926. It has a number of underground rooms hewn out of the mountain, and is surrounded by an open trench and also by a circle of barbed wire, but the latter could be crossed without difficulty at practically every point. The armaments consisted of four 10·5 and two 7·5cm. guns (made about 1898) in open positions, and also two old 8·4 field guns without recoil, but we managed to get them into some kind of working order. There were still comparatively large stocks of ammunition. Otherwise the fortress was practically devoid of equipment.

The greatest difficulty was caused by the fact that none of us had been at the fortress before. It took us some time to discover the outer works, which were snowed over. Several of the infantry trenches were also partly iced over, so that we had to break our way through. An important flank defence work on the north side was found only after the first infantry attack had taken place, and the well a few days before we had to surrender, but it was then so full of shrapnel and gunpowder residue that it was unusable. A great deal of work was also needed to clear away forest growth which had blocked the firing field of the guns.

We had hoped that the fortress would command Vaernes airfield, which was being used by the enemy. But our guns did not have the necessary range. We therefore constructed sledges for the old 8·4cm. guns with the idea of drawing them into a position on a mountain commanding the airfield from the south, but the enemy forestalled us by their attack.

For the first few days the enemy kept chiefly to Vaernes. In the afternoon of the 12th and the morning of April 13th, however, we observed signs which suggested that

**SWEEPING FOR MINES in a forward area of the Tunisian battlefield, these sappers, under enemy fire, clear the way for the first units of the 8th Army to attack the Mareth Line. A dramatic description of the furious fighting that ensued is given in Paul Bewsher's interview with a young British officer printed above.** *Photo, British Official*

important moves were pending. Planes could often be seen over the valley, and on the following day the Germans attacked our advanced guards. The guards at Maelen Bridge—numbering about ten men—were driven back at dawn. The forces at Hegra Bridge and railway station were attacked early in the morning, simultaneously from the north, across the river, and from the west, on the south side of the river. After a short but bitter fight the Norwegians were forced to withdraw to the south after Lieutenant Bergström and a number of his men had fallen. The bridge was blown up and most of the remaining troops later reached the fortress or the barricade guarding the approach.

In the afternoon the enemy by-passed the fortress and we were thus surrounded on the north and east, with only the ridge to the west and south still open. The next day the fortress itself was attacked from the east. Fortunately our guns faced this direction, and consequently fine work was done. The enemy approached to within 200 yards of the fort before they were halted; meanwhile the garrison were being pounded by the fire of smaller enemy guns from the north side of the valley.

The next day the most dangerous attack we were to experience was launched. Two battalions attacked mainly from the north, and for a while the fate of the old fortress hung in the balance. Our gun crews were driven back by the enemy machine-gun fire, and we were afraid the fort would be stormed. To prepare for this eventuality we installed machine-guns in the passages of the fort, but this was not necessary because our men drove the enemy back again and reoccupied our positions. Our position was further helped when snow began to fall so that the German artillery and the Luftwaffe were hampered. It is also said that the German infantry troops lost their way in the difficult terrain and began to shoot at each other. On this day the fort's water supply was interrupted.

The Nazis gradually occupied the surrounding districts and established positions closer to the fort. From April 18 communications with the outside world could only be maintained by sending out patrols who sneaked between the German sentries at night. Now we were subjected to continual heavy bombardment by aircraft and artillery. It looked as though the enemy had decided to try to starve us into surrender. Some very heavy bombs were dropped, but the aim was bad. We defended ourselves as best we could from these air attacks with machine-gun and rifle fire and we succeeded in bringing down two planes and damaging one other.

The enemy bombardment lasted day and night, with short intervals only, from April 15 to May 4, and during this time our infantry suffered considerably. In the fort itself two guns were put out of action and a look-out tower was damaged. When the battle started we had food for ten days, plus a meat reserve of two live horses. But particularly pressing was the need for fresh supplies of bread. We had no Army Service Corps to depend on and had to fend for ourselves. The only solution was to break through the German lines and get help from the civilian population.

At first supplies were brought by ski patrols across the mountain from Leksdal—about six hours there and six hours back. But the Germans occupied Leksdal, destroying the depot and the farm where it had been established. We were then obliged to get our supplies from Selbu, the journey there and back taking twenty-four hours. But the Germans reached Selbu, and as a last alternative we had to descend the steep mountain side west of the fortress into the Stjoer Valley itself, about a mile away, and fetch our food from there. Captain Hofstad was sent down into the valley and arranged for the baking of bread in the neighbouring farms. He brought the bread to the foot of the mountain, where it was collected by our patrols during the night. This continued until May 4, when we were told that there was no more flour left on the farms.

During their ordeal at Hegra the heroic Norwegian garrison suffered terrible privations—the worst being lack of sleep. These men manage to rest for a few moments.

DEFENDERS OF HEGRA, as described by Lt.-Col. Holtermann in this and the preceding page, defied the might of the German Army for a month. Bombarded night and day, the Norwegians held out in the face of insuperable difficulties. This photograph, taken during the siege, shows a party of the defenders in a casemate. *By courtesy of the Royal Norwegian Government*

Lighting became a problem because of oil shortage, and this caused considerable difficulty in the darkness of the interior of the fort. There was too little room, and it was damp and wet everywhere. We had to sleep in our clothes the whole time and there was just a little straw to lie on. When the water supply was cut, snow had to be brought in and melted, and wood had to be collected during the night from outside the fort. Later, when the thaw began, we were able to secure all the water we wanted by placing vats in the fortress rooms and collecting the water which dripped from the roofs. The medical staff did wonders. Patrols had to be sent out to bring in the wounded and dead. The dead—and the badly wounded also—had to be taken through the German lines, across the mountain, and down to the village on the other side. It was impossible to operate at the fortress.

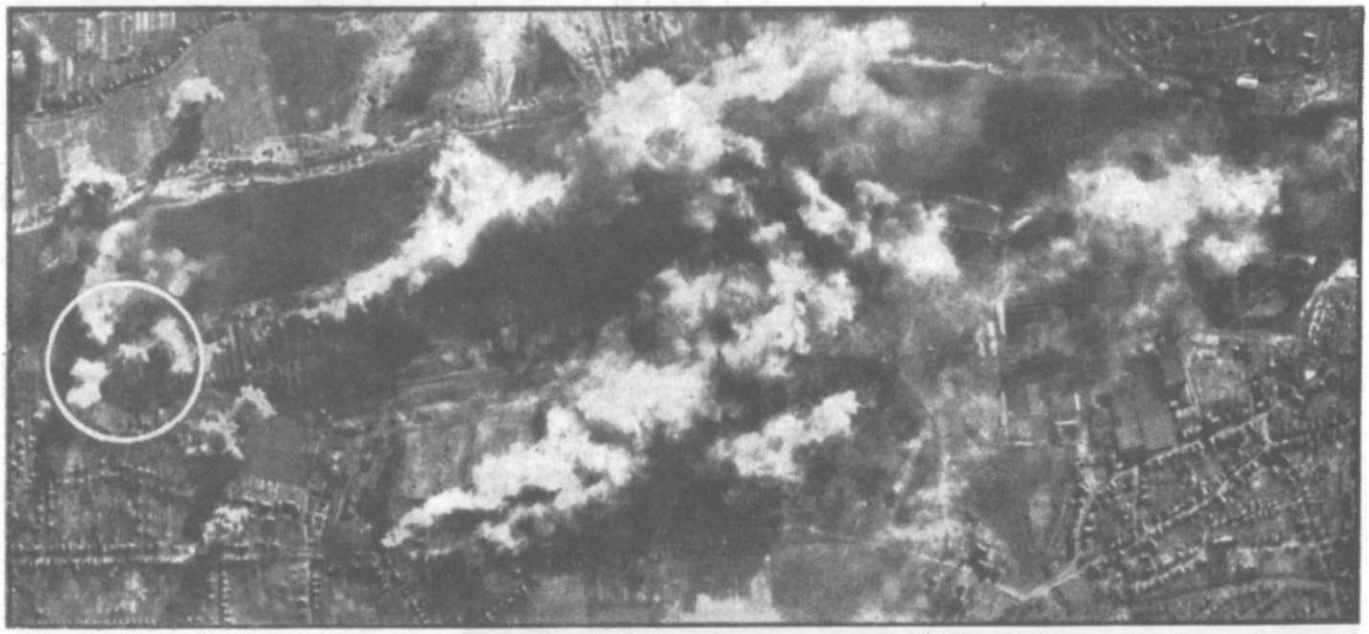
On the evening of May 4 we learned that the forces at Aandalsnes had capitulated on May 1, and the troops in North Tröndelag on May 2. We were thus alone in Southern Norway. It would have been possible to hold out for a day or two longer, but now there seemed to be little purpose in so doing. Consequently I paraded the whole detachment—everyone was in a bad state of health after the many privations—and told them we would have to capitulate. On the morning of May 5, 1940, the white flag was hoisted. The Battle of Hegra was ended.

# *I Went with U.S. Bombers to Plaster Vegesack*

On March 18, 1943, crews of the U.S. Army Eighth Air Force carried out a successful daylight raid on Vegesack, the U-boat "nest" near Bremen. Accompanying the raiders, in a Flying Fortress, was Wing-Comdr. N. J. Baird-Smith of the R.A.F. Bombing Directorate. Here is his story.

I WAS only a spectator, but as I was fairly far back in the formation, I had a grandstand view of the whole operation. It was a most impressive sight, especially when one realized that each of these aircraft had ten highly skilled men flying in it. The sky seemed to be full of Fortresses and Liberators. I think that this impression was increased by the close formation in which we were flying—a formation that was never broken. As we approached the enemy coast the fighters came up to have a look, but they seemed very shy of attacking. They hung about, apparently waiting for an aircraft to stray out of the fold, and I felt that they disliked the idea of coming near the American "guns." In spite of pretty heavy flak, our pilot got on to his target all right and made a good bombing run—straight and level. It was evident that the bombs of the preceding aircraft had found their mark, for the whole target was already obscured by thick smoke.

You can judge a good deal about the crew of a bomber by its efficiency on the return



**VEGESACK U-BOAT BUILDING YARDS suffered heavily when attacked by U.S. bombers on March 18, 1943. This daylight raid—an observer's account of which is given in this and the preceding page—brought congratulatory messages to Maj.-Gen. I. C. Eaker (commanding the U.S. 8th Army Air Force) from Mr. Churchill and Air Chief Marshal Sir C. Portal. This photo shows the target area as it appeared from one of the attacking U.S.A.A.F. bombers Numerous bursts almost obscure the Vulcan shipyards ; the power house area is shown by a circle.** *Photo, British Official*

journey. By this time they had been flying for quite a considerable time, and with the obvious strain such close formation flying imposed they became tired. I can say, however, that the formations returned as they had gone out—closely packed and ready to do battle with anybody.

The fighters were on the look-out for the lone aircraft homeward bound, possibly shot up by flak or disabled by fighters, thus being unable to keep with the main formations. There were plenty of fighters and they attacked until we were a considerable distance from the enemy coast, but these attacks became less and less aggressive as they saw the German coast receding ; until just before they left us they were milling round in the hope that a Fortress or Liberator would straggle.

Our particular formation had all the answers ready. One more aggressive Ju.88 which came in too close was met by an intense volume of fire and blew up ; and I saw a FW.190 spinning out of control on its way down towards the sea. The meticulous planning of this operation, combined with the efficiency of the crews and leaders in carrying out this no mean task, seems to me to be the keynote to the successful bombing of Vegesack with such a small loss of aircraft to the U.S.A.A.F.

# OUR DIARY OF THE WAR

***MARCH 17, 1943, Wednesday*** *1,292nd day*

**North Africa.**—In Central Tunisia U.S. forces captured Gafsa.

**Mediterranean.**—Fighters from Malta attacked railways in Sicily.

**Russian Front.**—In Chuguyev area, S.E. of Kharkov, Soviet troops drove Germans back and repelled six counter-attacks.

**Burma.**—Japanese pressure on the Mayu river led to withdrawal of our forces.

***MARCH 18, Thursday*** *1,293rd day*

**Air.**—U.S. Fortresses and Liberators heavily attacked U-boat yards at Vegesack, near Bremen, in daylight ; 52 enemy fighters claimed as shot down ; 2 bombers lost.

**North Africa.**—First Army troops withdrew from Tamera in N. Tunisia.

**Mediterranean.**—U.S. heavy bombers raided Naples by day and night.

**Australasia.**—Madang, Jap base in New Guinea, heavily raided by Liberators.

**General.**—French Guiana broke off allegiance to Vichy France.

***MARCH 19, Friday*** *1,294th day*

**North Africa.**—U.S. troops occupied El Guettar in S. Tunisia.

**Russian Front.**—Heavy fighting continued on the northern Donetz.

**Australasia.**—U.S. dive-bombers attacked Jap base at Vila, Solomons.

**General.** — Announced that Adm. Doenitz, C.-in-C. German Navy, had held three-day conference with Italian naval chief Admiral Riccardi.

***MARCH 20, Saturday*** *1,295th day*

**Air.**—Whirlwinds bombed railway viaduct at Morlaix, Brittany.

**North Africa.**—Eighth Army began attack on Mareth positions during night of 20th-21st.

**Mediterranean.**—Allied heavy bombers made night raid on Naples.

**Burma.**—British troops made progress towards Donbaik, N.W. of Akyab.

***MARCH 21, Sunday*** *1,296th day*

**Sea.**—Admiralty announced loss of destroyer Lightning.

**North Africa.**—In Mareth Line Eighth Army effected bridgehead across Wadi Zigzau ; flanking force approached El Hamma, north of Mareth Line. Americans occupied Maknassi.

**Mediterranean.**—Docks at Palermo heavily bombed ; night raid on Naples.

**Russian Front.**—Soviet troops evacuated Byelgorod, N. of Kharkov, but gained ground on central front and in Kuban.

**India.**—Japanese aircraft raided area of Chittagong.

***MARCH 22, Monday*** *1,297th day*

**Air.**—U.S. Fortresses and Liberators raided Wilhelmshaven by day ; 28 enemy fighters destroyed for loss of 3 bombers. R.A.F. made heavy night raid on St. Nazaire.

**North Africa.**—Germans launched counter-attacks on Eighth Army bridgehead in Mareth Line.

**Russian Front.**—Soviet troops captured Durovo, on Vyasma-Smolensk railway.

***MARCH 23, Tuesday*** *1,298th day*

**Air.**—Mosquitoes raided locomotive works near Nantes.

**North Africa.**—Germans regained greater part of 8th Army's bridgehead in Mareth positions, and attacked U.S. troops near El Guettar.

**Russian Front.**—Soviet troops captured Slavyanskaya in the Kuban.

**India.**—Enemy aircraft attacked airfield in S.E. Bengal.

**Australasia.**—Fortresses made heavy raid on enemy aircraft at airfields nr. Rabaul.

***MARCH 24, Wednesday*** *1,299th day*

**North Africa.**—Heavy artillery duels on Mareth Line.

**Mediterranean.** — Allied bombers made raid on Messina.

**Russian Front.**—In the Kuban Soviet troops captured Abynskaya, N.E. of Novorossisk.

***MARCH 25, Thursday*** *1,300th day*

**North Africa.**—Incessant Allied air attacks on enemy positions from Mareth to Sfax.

**Mediterranean.**—Malta-based aircraft attacked Rome-Naples railway.

**India.**—Jap bombers raided aerodrome in S.E. Bengal.

**Australasia.**—Allied aircraft made heaviest raid on Rabaul ; Amboina, Lae and Salamaua also attacked.

**U.S.A.**—American bombers made four raids on Kiska, Aleutians.

***MARCH 26, Friday*** *1,301st day*

**Sea.**—Admiralty announced loss of trawler Moravia.

**Air.**—R.A.F. made night raid on Duisburg and other targets in the Ruhr.

**North Africa.**—Attack by Eighth Army troops on positions S. of El Hamma forced enemy withdrawal from Mareth zone.

**Australasia.**—Liberators made heavy surprise raid on Nauru Island, S. Pacific.

***MARCH 27, Saturday*** *1,302nd day*

**Air.**—R.A.F. made heaviest raid to date on Berlin.

**North Africa.**—Fierce fighting continued in area of El Hamma north of the Mareth Line. In Central Tunisia Americans captured Fondouk.

**Burma.**—Air battle over Arakan area resulted in 12 Jap bombers being shot down, ten by Hurricanes without loss.

**Australasia.**—Raids on Jap bases at Malahang and Lae.

**General.**—Hundreds arrested and curfew imposed following sabotage at Aarhus, Denmark.

***MARCH 28, Sunday*** *1,303rd day*

**Air.**—Daylight raids by U.S. heavy bombers on railway yards at Rouen and by R.A.F. Venturas on shipping at Rotterdam. Heavy night raid on St. Nazaire.

**North Africa.**—Eighth Army occupied Mareth, Toujane and Matmata.

**Australasia.**—Sixty Jap aircraft raided Oro Bay, New Guinea ; 25 shot down.

***MARCH 29, Monday*** *1,304th day*

**Air.**—Venturas attacked shipping at Rotterdam and railway yards at Abbeville by day. R.A.F. made another heavy night raid on Berlin and also bombed Bochum in the Ruhr.

**North Africa.**—In Southern Tunisia Eighth Army troops occupied El Hamma and Gabès ; in the north the First Army closed in on Sejenane.

**Burma.**—U.S. Liberators attacked docks and mining plant at Tavoy ; R.A.F. made night raid on Heho airfield.

**Australasia.**—Jap bombers again raided Oro Bay, New Guinea, U.S. fighters attacked seaplane base at Faisi in the Solomons.

***MARCH 30, Tuesday*** *1,305th day*

**Air.**—Mosquitoes bombed Philips radio factory at Eindhoven.

**North Africa.**—Vanguard of Eighth Army in pursuit of Rommel, occupied Metouia and Oudref, N. of Gabès ; in N. Tunisia the First Army recaptured Sejenane.

**Russian Front.**—Hard fighting continued on northern Donetz where fresh German attacks were repelled.

**Australasia.**—Japanese convoy bound for New Guinea was attacked and driven off by Allied bombers ; docks at Finschafen also bombed.

## ★ Flash-backs ★

**1940**

March 20. *M. Reynaud formed Ministry in Paris following resignation of M. Daladier.*

**1941**

March 24. *El Agheila occupied by Axis forces ; first appearance of German Afrika Korps in Libya.*

March 25. *Yugoslav Premier and Foreign Minister signed Axis Pact.*

March 27. *Yugoslav Army under Gen. Simovitch deposed Govt. ; King Peter assumed power.*

*Agreement for lease to U.S.A. of naval and air bases in Atlantic signed in London.*

*British captured Keren, Italian stronghold in Eritrea.*

March 28. *Battle of Cape Matapan.*

**1942**

March 17. *Gen. MacArthur arrived in Australia as C.-in-C. of United Nations in S.W. Pacific.*

March 23. *Japanese occupied Andaman Is., Bay of Bengal.*

March 28. *Combined Operations raid on St. Nazaire ; H.M.S. Campbeltown rammed dock gate.*

# Editor's Postscript

STRANGE and wonderful is the language—I hesitate to call it English—written by our Whitehall scribes. But there is to be an improvement. Mr. Herbert Morrison has found time amid his innumerable cares and responsibilities to issue a circular, itself couched in concise and straightforward terms, urging the Civil Service to abandon their formal and cumbersome phraseology and express themselves in the English of everyday speech. Write in clear and simple language, is the keynote of the instructions. Keep your sentences short. Avoid officialese, and, above all, avoid clichés. Avoid ambiguity and do not hedge: if something is red, say so, and not "it appears to be of a somewhat reddish tint." Avoid stilted phraseology—"I am to," "I have to," and so on. Don't say "on the subject of" and "with reference to" when you mean "about" and "regarding." Time and trouble are well spent in seeing that circulars are clear and concise. If you have to turn down your correspondent's request, make it as clear as you can why you are turning it down.

SPEAKING recently at a luncheon given by the Waste Paper Recovery Association, Sir Andrew Duncan, Minister of Supply, said that since the beginning of the War nearly three million tons of waste paper have been salvaged. Generally speaking, the public have responded most loyally to the appeals to save paper, and a wonderful code of economy and recovery has been established. All the same, one can sympathize most heartily with the remarks made on the same occasion by Miss Megan Lloyd George, M.P. There would be greater confidence among the public in the salvage effort, she said, if they saw Government departments making greater efforts to save paper. "I think they might economize with great advantage in the use of forms," she went on. "The war effort would not be impeded, but greatly expedited if we could cut down a great many of those useless communications which are duplicated and sent out all over the country. It would be a great encouragement if it could be made clear that we are going to have a great and glorious clear-up of Whitehall to begin with."

WITH this Mr. Morrison would seem to agree, since another paragraph in his circular points out that "an enormous amount of the delay for which Government offices are blamed, particularly the really spectacular examples, is caused by the aimless circulation of paper in which no one will take an interest. So when a paper has been wrongly sent to you and you don't know whose job it is, keep on asking in likely places until you find out. Don't let the paper go until you have found out, and are sure you are passing it to the right quarter." Another injunction, and just as excellent, is that the newcomer to the Service should not jump to conclusions, become a slavish adherent to precedent and routine, but spend time and trouble in collecting and checking his facts. "This takes time, but it will be time well spent. Having surveyed your problem, make up your mind, and having made it up, stick to your view, unless it is later proved to be wrong. *Don't haver!*"

THIS last exhortation may prove a stumbling-block to some, as it has proved to A Scottish Civil Servant (Temporary), who has written to The Manchester Guardian. "The circular is splendid," he writes, "though for a long time I was greatly puzzled by the passage which ends by advising the new Civil Servant not to haver. After long study I suddenly realized that the Englishman who composed this document did not know what 'haver' meant. It is as plain as day. He means 'swither.'" Possibly, but only on the principle that the greater includes the less. To haver just means to indulge in any sort of pointless turgid talk, to be verbose and also uncertain; but to swither may be defined as "to doubt or hesitate, to be perplexed or undecided." There is really no obscurity in the wording of this Home Office circular, which is a most worthy document. Soon our Civil Servants ought to be writing with the sword-blade directness of our soldiers—of General Montgomery, for instance, some of whose phrases, like his recent "Rommel is caught like a rat in a trap . . . We will, in fact, give him a very bloody nose," are examples of good direct idiomatic speech, compared with the periphrastic phraseology of your bureaucrat. But didn't Mr. Churchill issue a circular on similar lines not long ago—and where Winston failed can Herbert succeed?

AIR VICE-MARSHAL A. H. ORLEBAR, A.F.C., whose appointment as Deputy Chief to Vice-Adm. Lord Louis Mountbatten, C.-in-C. Combined Operations, was announced on March 19; 1943. An expert on air defence, he evolved some of the fighter tactics employed in the Battle of Britain, 1940. *Photo, British Official*

LAURENCE BINYON, who died on March 10 in his 74th year, will live in men's memories as the author of the stanza:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

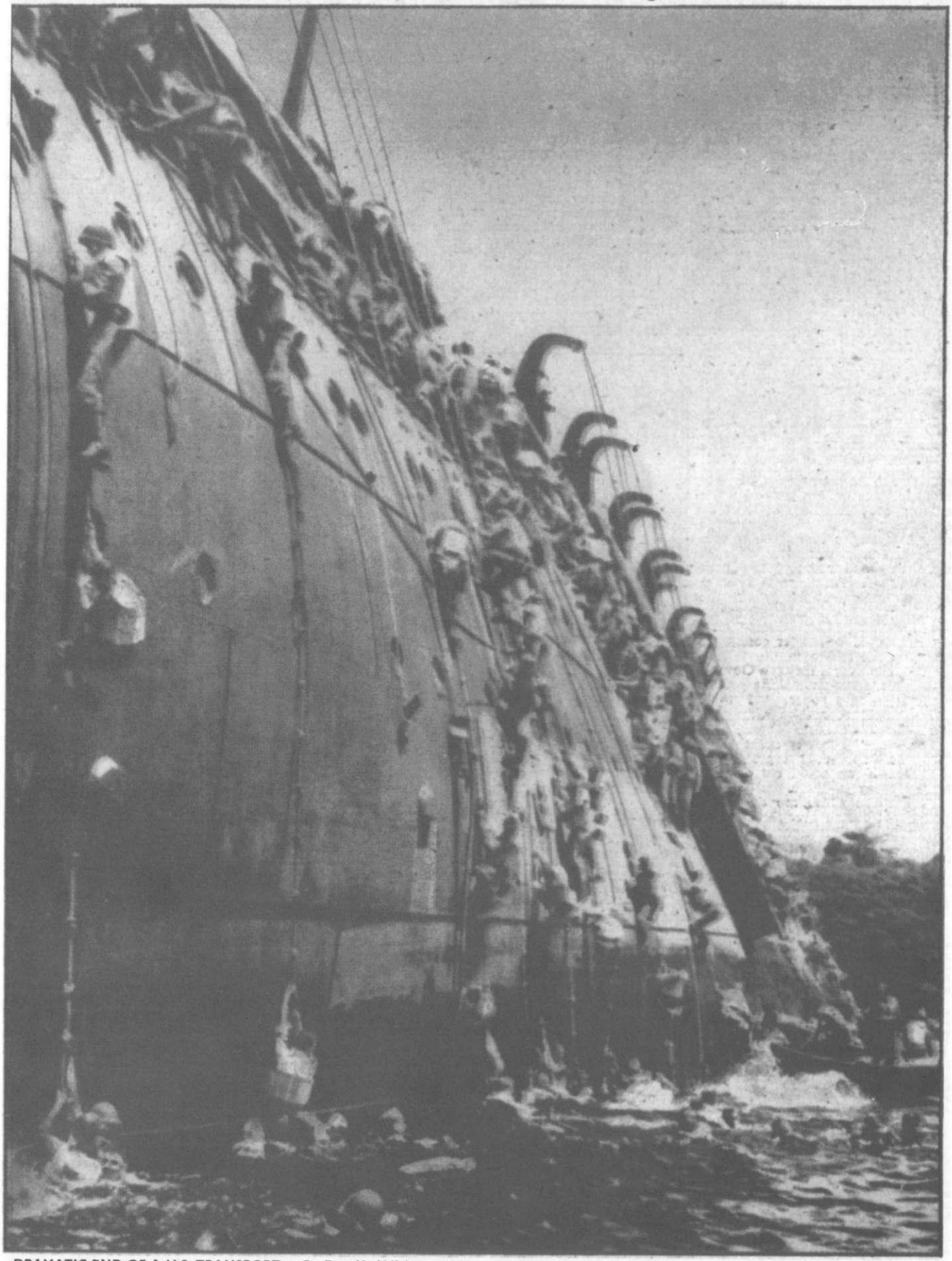
Engraved at the doorway of the British Museum, where Dr. Binyon was for nearly forty years an official in the Department of Prints and Drawings, the lines form part of his poem, For the Fallen, which was originally published in September 1914, when the first casualty lists were bringing home the meaning of war's sacrifice. As every old soldier knows, they have a prominent part in the simple ritual of the British Legion, and are often recited on those occasions when we are called upon to remember those who have died in order that England may live. Binyon's qualities as a poet were recognized even in youth, but it is not so generally realized that he was also an authority on the fine arts, more particularly on the art of Japan and China.

READING in one of the Sunday newspapers of the Nazis' latest pep-raising whisper, that they have nearly completed a tunnel under the Channel and that we in England cannot for the life of us discover where it is going to debouch—reading this reminded me of the Channel Tunnel proposals of earlier and happier days, when we in England thought it would be a distinct advantage to get to the Continent without the unpleasantness of *mal-de-mer*. Much more than a hundred years ago the idea was mooted by Napoleon I, and an actual scheme was submitted to Napoleon III in 1856 by a French engineer. Many on this side of the Channel supported the proposal, among them Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and the great engineers Brunel and Robert Stephenson, not to mention the politicians Gladstone, Bright and Lord Salisbury. On the other hand there was strong opposition, from those who feared the effect on Victorian ways and morals of holiday-making "Froggies," and also from the Blimps of the War Office. But a Channel Tunnel Company was formed, and from near Folkestone and near Calais preliminary tunnels were driven under the sea for a mile or so.

BUT beyond this nothing had been done when the First Great War broke out, and nothing has been done since—save that in 1922 Marshal Foch stated that if the Channel Tunnel had been built it might have prevented the war and in any case would have shortened it by half, and that a year or two later Mr. Winston Churchill came out strongly in its favour. In the light of what happened in France in 1940 some may think it was a very good thing that the proposal never got beyond the blue-print stage. But if the tunnel *had* been built we might have rendered more effective succour to our ally, and from Dunkirk our men might have brought back their guns and equipment. And it would have been an easy matter to block or blow up the tunnel so as to prevent the Germans using it; indeed, the plans allowed for a dip in mid-tunnel which could be flooded in wartime. Now the Germans are building the tunnel—so they say. So if you go bathing this summer don't be surprised if you step on a pickelhaube's spike . . .

MUCH has been written of the dramatic arrival in Britain of Alfred Horn, more famous (or infamous) as Rudolf Hess, boon companion of the Fuehrer. The story is told again—and this time I suppose it is really official—in Roof Over Britain: the Official Story of the A.A. Defences 1939-1942, recently published by H.M. Stationery Office at 9d. But this story is only one of many in a book which is primarily concerned with the air battle that was fought so short a time ago. The Great London Barrage, the Blitzes on the Humber, Portsmouth Fights Back, A.A. Women, Balloons in Battle, Balloons at Sea—this selection of chapter-headings will indicate Roof Over Britain's contents.

# Abandon Ship! Of 4,000 Only 4 Were Lost



**DRAMATIC END OF A U.S. TRANSPORT.** On Dec. 12, 1942 it was announced that the President Coolidge, former American luxury liner but of late a troopship, had been sunk off the Solomons. She struck a mine ; and though she was rammed on to a coral reef, she slipped off and turned turtle. Of the 4,000 troops on board only four were drowned, so fine was the rescue effort. Built in 1931 this ship, a turbo-electric vessel, was the tenth U.S. transport to be sunk since America entered the War. Above, troops are seen swarming over the side of the doomed ship. *Photo, New York Times Photos*

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